THE INDIAN STUDENTS' LIBRARY.

THE CONFESSIONS OF A THUG

BY

MEADOWS TAYLOR

ABRIDGED AND ANNOTATED BY

THEODORE DOUGLAS DUNN, M.A., D.LITT.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS, PRESIDENCY DIVISION, BENGAL.

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

HORNBY ROAD, BOMBAY,

6, OLD COURT HOUSE STREET, CALCUTTA.

167, MOUNT ROAD, MADRAS.

LONDON AND NEW YORK.

1922

CONFESSIONS OF A THUG.

THE INDIAN STUDENTS' LIBRARY.

THE CONFESSIONS OF A THUG

BY

MEADOWS TAYLOR

ABRIDGED AND ANNOTATED BY

THEODORE DOUGLAS DUNN, M.A., D.LITT.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS, PRESIDENCY DIVISION, BENGAL.

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

HORNBY ROAD, BOMBAY.

6, OLD COURT HOUSE STREET, CALCUTTA.

167, MOUNT ROAD, MADRAS.

LONDON AND NEW YORK.

1922

PREFACE.

THE aim of this series—*The Indian Students' Library*—is to provide convenient editions of the best books written by English authors on India and on Indian subjects. It is hoped that Indian students of the English language will find in these works an adequate representation of the life with which they are familiar. Most teachers of English in India will agree that one of their chief difficulties is the choice of suitable reading material for their pupils. At those stages of instruction that precede University study, and for some time after Matriculation, the aim of the teacher must be linguistic rather than literary. For this reason it is expedient to direct the student to such books as deal with the history, the life, the religion and the customs of his native land. In this way unnecessary and unfair difficulties of subject are avoided; and the mind of the reader is free to engage itself with matters of language, while his interest is comfortably sustained.

From this point of view the individual books of this series have been selected; and in dealing with the original texts the following arrangements have been made:—

(1) The story has been preserved in the order of its development. The omissions made through exigencies of space do not affect either the sequence of the plot, or the original scheme of the author.

(2) Whatever has been considered unsuitable for the school or college class-room has been removed. This has affected the original text very slightly; as no works,

in themselves really unsuitable for the perusal of young readers, have been included in this series.

(3) For the convenience of the teacher, each chapter has been divided into sections with an appropriate title. Each section is a self-contained unit with an interest of its own, and it should form a useful class lesson in itself.

(4) There is an introduction to each book giving the essential facts of the author's career and some literary criticism of his work. This has been written mainly for the teacher. The notes have been made as brief as possible, and deal only with the outstanding difficulties of the text.

In the selection of books for a series of this kind, the range of choice is not unlimited. In some cases it is necessary to go outside of India, and to select works that deal with the East in general; and in other cases it is expedient to introduce memoirs and records of travel that may not have been written by Englishmen. But no work has been selected that does not provide a model of pure and simple English.

It is sometimes forgotten that there is a literature of British India; and that the history of India for a hundred years after Warren Hastings has something more to show than petty wars and domestic legislation. If this series is successful in reviving interest in a literature that deals primarily with Indian things, and in introducing that literature to the young Indian student, one object of its production will have been suitably achieved.

INTRODUCTION.

Philip Meadows Taylor was born in Liverpool in 1808. At the age of fifteen he was sent to Bombay to enter a business house; but, as his position and prospects had been misrepresented, he welcomed the opportunity of enlisting in the service of the Nizam of Hyderabad. A military commission in the Army of the Nizam was obtained for him through the influence of Mr. William Newnham of the Bombay Government. This kindness was never forgotten; and to his friend in 1840 Meadows Taylor dedicated the second of his novels, *Tippu Sultan.*

From 1824, the year of his entering the service of the Nizam, until 1860, when failing health compelled his return to Europe, his duties were both civil and military. Up to the year 1841 his work lay chiefly with the Nizam's army. From 1841 to 1853 he was stationed in the principality of Shorapur. He then took over charge of one of the five Berar districts; and in 1858 he returned to Shorapur as commissioner. At no period was he directly in the employment of the Crown or of the Company. Throughout his whole Indian career he was in the Nizam's service; and this may explain in part his intimacy with and sympathy for all classes of the Indian community. In 1860 he retired to Europe; and in 1876 while returning from India which he had re-visited, he died at Mentone in the south of France.

Meadows Taylor's career covers roughly the half century leading up to the Indian Mutiny and the abolition of the rule of John Company. In the light of his experiences of that famous time he

looked back upon India's past, and endeavoured to interpret her history to his own people. His service in India began in the year of the first Burmese War, and lasted until Lord Canning's proclamation of peace after the Mutiny. Most of the important changes of this period took place during the tenure of office of Lords Bentinck, Dalhousie and Canning. Sati had been abolished. Education was not only introduced but generously established. Railways were opened. British armies were successful against the Afghans and Sikhs, and the Mutiny had been thoroughly quelled. In the employ of the Nizam's government, any prominent part in these great events was denied to Meadows Taylor; but, if he held no distinguished military post in the Mutiny, his influence in preventing the spread of anarchy was of the greatest value. His district of Berar had an important geographical position; and his firm control of this area, his influence over the people and the love they bore him, effectually hindered the advance of sedition into the Nizam's dominions.

The events of this time are fully detailed in his autobiography entitled *The Story of My Life*. This is a record of untiring energy in the work of uplifting those who were committed to his care. At the same time it is a document of great historical value, throwing light upon the conditions of Indian and Anglo-Indian life in the earlier period of the reign of Queen Victoria. It abounds with references to the outstanding men of that time, and reveals a breadth of view and a capacity for sympathy that are often thoughtlessly denied to the founders of the British Empire in India. Such debatable subjects as education, and the progressive measures of a reformer like Lord Dalhousie, were accepted by Meadows Taylor in the most enlightened spirit of sympathy with the aspirations of the Indian people. In the educational controversy of that time between the supporters of the ancient oriental classics and the advocates of

English and the vernaculars as the medium of instruction, he appears to have taken a prominent and decisive part. In his letters to the Times he supported the view set forth in the famous minute of Macaulay; and later he wrote: "I have never regretted the part I took in this discussion when I see the noble results which have been already attained, and are rapidly advancing year by year all over India, in all its regions and in all its vernacular languages." Equally interesting are his comments upon the work of Lord Dalhousie whom he described as "the most practically useful and singleminded ruler that India has ever possessed. His great mind took in every question with a singular clearness and he improved everything he touched. To him India owes telegraphs, railways, extension of practical education, large irrigation projects, roads and the removal of many disabilities under which Indians suffered. At no period of Indian history has the administration of India been so admirably conducted." Enough has been quoted to show the attitude of Meadows Taylor to the progressive measures of his time, and to justify, if any justification were needed, the introduction of his literary work to young Indian readers

It is reasonable that this introduction should be made through the best of his novels, *The Confessions of a Thug*, the greatest romance of the Indian road ever given to the world. Its author was happily situated for the acquisition of the special knowledge required to explain and describe these strange beings, the Thugs of Hindustan. In his intimate acquaintance with the affairs of his district, Meadows Taylor had become convinced of the existence of Thuggee as a form of organized crime. About the year 1829 many bodies of men who had been strangled were found in Shorapur. Enquiries were made; and it came to light that certain people resident in that portion of the district were absent from their homes for stated periods in the year. They passed for Mussalman

merchants who carried on trade with Mysore and brought back wearing apparel, copper and brass vessels. Meadows Taylor arranged for some of his officers to disguise themselves as Fakirs and have these people tracked; but, on the death of the Nizam in 1829, changes were made in the administration of the state, that compelled him to rejoin his regiment. He writes with some feeling: "I earnestly entreated to be allowed to remain even a short time to prosecute my enquiries respecting the mysterious murders which had been perpetrated in my district. Had I been allowed to remain, I should have been the first to disclose the horrible crime of Thuggee to the world." This distinction was denied to Meadows Taylor; but another officer who was in civil employ, and in independent charge of the district of Narsinghpur in the Nerbudda Valley, had been attracted by the mystery of Thuggee. This was William Henry Sleeman who had come to India in 1809 and served with distinction in the Nepal campaign of 1816. About the year 1830, it was reported to this officer that a gang of Thugs were living in the village of Kandeli within a stone's throw of his own courthouse; and that a *bhil*, or murder place, existed in the groves of Mandesar on the Saugor Road. Captain Sleeman was fortunate in being in charge of Narshingpur, as this place, owing to its central position, was much frequented by the Thugs. He was also fortunate in the arrest of Feringheea, a well-known Thug leader, whose confessions revealed the fact that Thuggee was an organised association of criminals. Up to this time the authorities had been unwilling to attach serious importance to the idea that a widespread system of murder existed in India; but, in the reports of Captain Sleeman submitted in 1831-2, it was proved conclusively that such a system did exist, and that its vigour and extent were a serious menace to society.

Here at last was some justification for the suspicions of Meadows Taylor which he had reported to the authorities in 1829. The discoveries of

Sleeman soon bore fruit in bringing to justice the Thugs of the Deccan: and Meadows Taylor writes with enthusiasm: "Famous discoveries in regard to the practice of Thuggee had recently been made at Jubbulpore and Saugor by Captain Sleeman, which made a sensation in India never to be forgotten. By the confessions of one gang who were apprehended, many Thugs in Central India were brought to justice; and at last the Thugs of the Deccan were denounced by these approvers, and they were at once arrested. I volunteered my services in the labour of collecting evidence, and they were accepted. Day after day I recorded tales of murder which possessed an intense interest, and as fast as new approvers came in new mysteries were unravelled and new crimes confessed. Names of Thugs all over the Deccan were registered, and I found one list containing the names of nearly all those whom I had suspected in my old district. The reader will remember my intense anxiety on this subject in 1829, and my conviction that deadly crime existed and was only awaiting discovery; now it was all cleared, but I felt sore that it had not fallen to my lot to win the fame of the affair." If Meadows Taylor has not been given the credit of discovering the existence of Thuggee, he will be remembered as its most distinguished historian; and his name will be connected with that of Lord William Bentinck and of Sir William Henry Sleeman to whose efforts India owes her deliverance from a pestilent form of crime.

It may well be asked what is the nature and origin of the Thug system. In his work, Ramaseeana, in which Ramasee the peculiar slang of the Thugs is described, Sleeman attributes the origin of Thuggee to those wandering tribes who infested the roads of sixteenth century India, and whom travellers described as being extremely skilful in the art of snaring their victims by casting a running noose over them. These people appear to have had a very ancient origin, and are mentioned

by Herodotus as forming part of the invading armies of Xerxes. Whether or not the history of the modern Thugs may be traced in classical literature, their superstitions indicate an extreme antiquity; and whether they called themselves Hindu or Moslem, they united in a common worship of a Hindu Deity. Whatever their religious profession, no one of them doubted the divine origin of the system of Thuggee, or failed to believe that, in following their trade of murder with the prescribed rites and observances, they were acting under the immediate auspices of the goddess Bhowani. In this way the Thug was a stranger to remorse. His victims were so many sacrifices offered up to the goddess, and he could contemplate their fate unmoved. The religious character of the whole system, illustrated in the elaborate rites attaching to it, was substantiated by the confessions of captured Thugs. It is further illustrated by the fact that seldom or never has cruelty of a wanton or unnecessary kind been practised by these criminals. Their victims were despatched as speedily as possible, and they were forbidden to murder women and the members of certain specified castes. Failure to observe this rule was explained by the Thugs themselves as the cause of their downfall, in so far as they had offended their patron goddess. Their implicit faith in the validity of their ceremonial gave a certain sanctity to their profession, and bound them to each other under the most solemn obligations. In this way a confederacy of elaborate organisation and of astonishing extent continued to flourish for centuries, until it came into conflict with a centralised system of enquiry capable of prosecuting its investigations throughout the whole of India.

In the absence of this system it is easy to understand how the Thugs flourished. In a continent divided into various territories under separate rulers, there was no uniform system of roads under the protection of a single police organisation. Indeed there were no roads worthy of the name,

and no method of public conveyance. Travellers did not put up in towns, but encamped without the gates, and so left no record of their progress. The legal system of one territory differed from that of another; and there was frequent strife between the rulers of separate kingdoms. It is no exaggeration to say that the whole political structure of India before the establishment of the British Government with its centralised executive, favoured this peculiar form of crime. The Thugs were fully alive to their own interests. Their place of abode was never the scene of their deeds of violence. They made themselves amenable to local authority, paid heavily in taxes, and frequently shared their distant plunder with their local rulers. Their activities abroad may have been suspected; but their conduct at home was both pleasing and remunerative to those in power. In this way the Thugs continued to be tolerated; and there are no records of their discovery until the time of Akbar when many executions appear to have been ordered. At that time, of course, Thuggee was unknown as an organised criminal system. In 1810 army orders were issued warning soldiers returning to their homes of the danger to be expected from Thugs; and in 1816 their practices were to a certain extent explained and described in the Literary Journal of Madras. Up to the year 1830 there were frequent arrests; but not until the time of Feringheea's disclosures to Sleeman was the whole terrible truth laid bare. By the year 1832 India was roused to horrified curiosity by the reports forwarded to the authorities; and in 1836 the publication of *Ramaseeana* spread abroad the dark secrets that had caused untold misery for centuries.

Meadows Taylor had the advantage of seeing this work, when in 1837 he was writing *The Confessions of a Thug.* In the preface he has acknowledged his indebtedness to the author of *Ramaseeana;* and so the reader has the double advantage of Sleeman's long

investigations and of Meadows Taylor's capacity for romantic description. The origin of *The Confessions* is full of interest. In 1832, when recording the statements of captured Thugs, Meadows Taylor wrote an article on their system of murder which he sent to his father. This was shown to Sir Edward Bulwer who wrote to the author advising him to write a romance on the subject. This advice was not forgotten; and in 1837 when recovering from a severe attack of fever, Meadows Taylor began *The Confessions*. As he himself admits in the second preface of the novel, the work was begun as an amusement. He was too weak to sit up, and wrote with a board on his knees while reclining in an easy chair, "little thinking, or perhaps even hoping, that the work would ever be printed." The chapters as they were completed were given to a brother officer to read, and his demands for more brought the book to a conclusion. The whole manuscript was taken on the eventful journey to Egypt made by the author and his family in 1837; and when at Malta, it was handed over to a relative to avoid the delay of quarantine. Here the book had a narrow escape: in order to disinfect them, "the three volumes were first scored through with knives, then smoked with sulphur till the ink turned pale." In spite of this drastic treatment, the book arrived in England and was given to Bentley, "Publisher in Ordinary to the Queen." When Meadows Taylor reached London, he soon found himself occupied in curtailing and condensing his story, much of which had been described by the publisher as too horrible to print. Fortunately for the author, the novel was shown to Queen Victoria as it was passing through the press; and she directed the proof sheets, as they were revised, to be sent to her. Its publication created a great stir. In his autobiography the author writes with enthusiasm: "I found my book, the *Confessions*, had been received with much greater interest and success than I had ever

ventured to hope for. It was curious to hear people wondering over the book and discussing it; and evidently the subject was a new sensation to the public. I was asked also to write another book, which should take the place of an historical novel, and become the forerunner of a series of such Indian works, and Tippu Sultan was chosen as the subject."

This was published in 1840. The series which it foreshadowed was actually completed, but at a much later date, in the leisure of the author's retirement in England. The historical novels in their order were as follows:—

(1) *Tara*: this was published in 1863. It describes the development of the power of the Mahrattas and the blow struck by them against the Muhammadans in 1657.

(2) *Ralph Darnell*: this was published in 1865. Its subject is the rise of the British power in India and the victory of Plassey in 1757.

(3) *Seeta*: this was published in 1872. It describes the events of the Mutiny in 1857.

These works illustrate the great modern periods of Indian history at exact intervals of one hundred years. Of the three *Tara* was the most ambitious, and its success was considerable. This was all the more pleasing to the author as he had kept silence for more than twenty years from the time of his writing the *Confessions* and *Tippu Sultan*. One other novel, *A Noble Queen*, with Chand Bibi as heroine, was produced in 1875; and in 1877, the year after Meadows Taylor's death, his daughter issued his autobiography. If his many contributions to the Times on political subjects be excluded, a brief history of India completes the list of his literary works. This was written in order to provide for the student and the general reader a single narrative of the main events of Indian history in an accessible form. The work was pub-

lished in 1871 after two years of patient study and research.

In all his writings Meadows Taylor had one definite aim, the interpretation of the East to the West, and the creation of a better understanding between the English and Indian races. One of his latest remarks is worth recording: "I am glad to hear that my works have been read, if it be only to prove to those who read them that my interest in the people of India, of all classes, is as strong as ever, and increases with time." This interest was never better illustrated than in *The Confessions of a Thug.* Amir Ali, the central figure of the story is a great hero of romance; and, at the same time, he is an individual who actually existed and whose confessions, duly recorded by Meadows Taylor himself, threw much light upon the crime of Thuggee. The whole work is a triumphant combination of fact and fiction, and places its author amongst that select community of writers who found their subjects in Eastern life and who created faithful pictures of the real East in which the West could find the truth.

In the eighteenth century England derived her knowledge of oriental life mainly from the *Arabian Nights,* made known for the first time to Europe about the year 1712. In imitation of the *Arabian Nights* there were produced in England many fantastic tales founded upon a purely fanciful conception of the life of the East; and, early in the nineteenth century, such poets as Thomas Moore in *Lalla Rookh*, and Robert Southey in *The Curse of Kehama* adopted oriental subjects without any real knowledge of the life or customs they attempted to describe. When Napoleon began to look to the East as a possible field for his ambitious military projects, and when British arms had been successful at the Battle of the Nile and in the defence of Acre, the nearer East became a centre of critical diplomacy and of general Imperial interest. After the victory of Waterloo travel in Asia Minor and Persia became popular; and a litera-

ture descriptive of the Orient of fact and not of fancy, began to appear in England. Of those writers who found a congenial theme for fiction in the East of reality, Thomas Hope was the first. He had travelled widely in Asia Minor, in Greece, Turkey and Egypt; and when his novel, *Anastasius or the Modern Greek*, appeared in 1819, its descriptions of Levantine life were so vivid that the literary world of London attributed the book to Lord Byron. The success of *Anastasius* prompted James Justinian Morier to make use of his intimate knowledge of Persian life for the purposes of realistic fiction. He had been attached to the British Embassy in Constantinople and in Teheran, and had studied the language and the life of Persia. When his first novel, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*, appeared in 1823, it gained an immediate popularity; and even to the present day, it is considered the best novel of oriental life ever written by a Western. Persia had special attractions for the traveller and the writer; and, in the history of Persia, James Baillie Fraser found a congenial subject for his *Kuzzilbash* and *Persian Adventurer*. In both these novels (the second appeared in 1830) he described the career of Nadir Shah, the turbulent life of the Indian border and the terrific sack of Delhi. Indian life was next illustrated by a clever imitator of Morier who took as his theme the adventurous career of a Mahratta Prince in the Bombay Presidency. This writer was William Browne Hockley whose *Pandurang Hari* gives a faithful picture of the darker side of Indian life, both Hindu and Moslem.

It is clear from this brief resumé of the novel of oriental life that, in their choice of theme, these English writers of fiction moved steadily eastwards. They found successive subjects in Turkey and Asia Minor, in Persia, on the Afghan border, in the Bombay Presidency and lastly in the State of Hyderabad. Their tradition of a closely realistic treatment of eastern life was followed by Meadows

Taylor in *The Confessions of a Thug*. He is the last of a school of novelists whose aim was to describe the realities of the orient for the people of England. While he is the last, he is at the same time the best of all those who found their themes in India. *The Confessions* is to the life of India what *Hajji Baba* is to Persia. Both novels have the same fidelity to detail, and exhibit the same intimate understanding of oriental character; but the work of Morier belongs to the world of comedy, while that of Meadows Taylor is grimly tragic in its setting and has been inspired by a serious moral purpose.

His tale is a progressive narrative of crime, and embraces a vast central area of India. His hero is at once a monster and a man; but, as the novel develops, it is the human aspect of his character that is uppermost. With the original intention of exposing a criminal system, Meadows Taylor was trapped by his literary method; and, in the *Confessions*, there is everything that transforms the scoundrel into a figure of romance. Amir Ali, the chief Thug, is worthy of scrutiny. From the start he enlists the reader's sympathy. He was not born a Thug, but was thrown upon the world as the kidnapped child of respectable parentage; and he shrinks in terror from the discovery that Ismail, his foster-father, is by trade a robber and assassin. But, by the most solemn rites, he is initiated into a brother-hood from which there is no escape; and when little more than a child, he is persuaded of religious sanction for deeds of murder and plunder. When he wins a recognized place in his band, he blossoms into gallantry and falls in love with a dancing-girl. From a headstrong lover he develops into a faithful husband. Nothing can shake his love for his wife, Azeema, and he never recovers from the death of his son. These domestic virtues appear curiously out of place in a monstrous criminal; but, greatest wonder of all, Amir Ali, the assassin, is at the same time a sportsman. He is prepared to throw aside the

roomal and to take to the sword when challenged even by a Rajput to single combat; and in the field with Chettoo, the Pindharee, he displays every virtue of the hardened soldier. He is generous and averse to wanton cruelty. The horrors of Pindharee torture he cannot endure; and he intercedes for the honour of women and for the respect and preservation of old age. His career is dramatic in its development, and pitiful in its climax. His fall is so represented as to enlist the reader's sympathy; for his betrayer, the Rajah of Jhalone, is almost as deep in Thuggee and its fruits as Amir Ali himself. With mean hypocrisy the Rajah denounces him in open *durbar,* has his foster-father crushed to death by an elephant, his wife and child turned into the streets, and the whole of his concealed plunder transferred to his own treasury. In this ruin, his daughter is Amir Ali's first concern; and on his final capture by the English, he would have remained faithful to his vows as a Thug, had not domestic affection been uppermost. At the last he appears almost in the dignity of tragedy. Broken by prison and sorrow, his thoughts are with his dead wife and the daughter whom he cannot trace.

The minor characters of the *Confessions* are so chosen as to throw the light of romance upon the central figure, and to relieve him of a certain burden of crime. Guffoor Khan, the Pindaree captain and the follower of Chettoo, is a monster of cruelty. Beside him Amir Ali appears as nothing more than a swift and merciful executioner; and, time and again, he steps in to prevent the more violent of his atrocities. The worst scenes of horror in which Guffoor Khan finds pleasure, it is impossible to attempt to reproduce; and the sympathy of the reader goes with Amir Ali when he lures the Pindaree monster to his tent, strangles him and buries him where he lies. Chettoo belongs to history. He illustrates the political chaos of a country in which Thuggee was only one of a thousand evils; and in his rapacity and ruthless-

ness, the reader for a moment forgets the crimes of the Thug. The many victims of the latter do not affect the development of the narrative. Most of them are little more than dummy figures whose swift disappearance enriches the hero without arousing the interest or sympathy of the spectators. But at intervals Meadows Taylor uses the victims of the Thug to deepen the horror of his tale; and in this way he fulfils his moral purpose in writing the *Confessions*. The death of Amir Alí's sister by the hand of her own brother who was bent on securing a charm for his youngest child, is so told as to fill the mind of the reader with terror and foreboding. In scenes like these Meadows Taylor painted a picture of Indian life sombre enough to rouse the whole world to horrified curiosity. But it is in these detailed episodes, and not in the character of Amir Ali as a whole, that he points his moral and accomplishes the exposure which, he admits, was the original purpose of his work.

The general scheme of the *Confessions* embraces a vast territory. Its descriptions of places, scenery and people are vivid and accurate, the result of first hand observation; and in the general atmosphere of the work, the author has caught the spirit of India and the point of view of its people. The period of his novel is that of the maturity of Thuggee in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century. Amir Ali found his opportunity in the society which nourished Pandurang Hari, a society disorganised by Mahratta factions, by Pindaree raids and by the rapidly developing power of the English. He operated over an area whose central cities were Nagpur and Hyderabad; but he had exploited the roads as far as Bombay; and, as a freebooter under Chettoo, he had plundered the richest tracts of the Nizam's dominions, had crossed the Krishna and ravaged the lands to the north of Masulipatam. Meadows Taylor draws a glowing picture of Hyderabad, that most oriental of Indian cities; and describes to the life the variety,

movement and colour of the Mohurrum festival. He knows the varied life of the road; and the *Confessions* must be placed in the forefront of all novels that deal with the highways of a continent. To read his pages is to feel the soft odour of the Indian bazaar; to draw in to the caravanserai when the homing cattle are deepening the twilight with their dust; to hear the long-drawn wail of the jackal across the plains that open to the flaming stars; and to listen to the tom-toms throbbing from some dim-lit shrine.

In its descriptions of Indian scenery, in its romantic adventure and in its historical portraiture, the *Confessions* found a ready welcome in Europe. More than any other single publication it affected English opinion on India, and resulted in a beneficial scrutiny of everything that pertains to the Indian Empire. In this, his first novel, Meadows Taylor realised his ambition, an ambition simply expressed at the close of his life when he wrote: "I wanted to bring India nearer to England—to bring its people nearer to our people; and if, by my descriptions of life among the Indians, any have felt more interest in their Eastern brothers and sisters, or have been led to read or study more, my object has been attained."

[illegible] of the Mahrattas [illegible]. He knows the varied life of the country and [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] with the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] are [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] near the [illegible] [illegible] of the [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] by the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible].

[illegible] descriptions of Indian scenery, [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] and [illegible] its historical [illegible], [illegible] found a ready welcome in Europe. More than any other single publication [illegible] English readers to India, and [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] of everything that pertains [illegible] the Indian Empire. [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] his ambition, [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] of his life [illegible] [illegible] to bring India nearer to [illegible] and to bring its people nearer to our people, [illegible] [illegible] descriptions of life [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] interest in [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] have [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] has been attained.

CONTENTS :

CHAPTER I.

THE THUG'S INTRODUCTION TO THE READER.

1.—*Amir Ali tells his story.*

The earliest remembrance I have of anything, and until a few years ago it was very indistinct, is of a village in the territories of Holkar, where I was born. Who my parents were I know not. I suppose them to have been respectable, from the circumstance of my always wearing gold and silver ornaments, and having servants about me. I have an indistinct recollection of a tall fair lady whom I used to call mother, and of an old woman who always attended me, and who I suppose was my nurse, also of a sister who was younger than myself, but of whom I was passionately fond. I can remember no other particulars, until the event occurred which made me what I am, and which is vividly impressed on my mind.

From an unusual bustle in the house, and the packing up of articles of clothing and other necessaries, I supposed we were on the eve of departure from our home. I was right in my conjecture, for we left it the next morning. My mother and myself travelled in a *dooly*, old Chumpa was mounted on my pony, and my father rode his large horse. Several of the sons of our neighbours accompanied us; they were all armed, and I suppose were our escort.

On the third or fourth day after we left our village, after our march of the day, we as usual put up in an empty shop in the bazaar of the town we rested at. My father left us to go about on his own business, and my mother, who could not show herself outside, after repeated injunctions that I

was not to stray away, lay down in an inner room and went to sleep. Finding myself at liberty, as Chumpa was busy cooking and the *juwans* were all out of the way, I speedily forgot all my mother's orders, and betook myself to play with some other children in the street. We were all at high romps, when a good-looking man of middle age addressed me, and asked me who I was—I must have been remarkable from the rest of the ragged urchins about me, as I was well dressed and I had some silver and gold ornaments on my person. I told him that my father's name was Yoosuf Khan, and that he and my mother and myself were going to Indoor.

"Ah, then," said he, "you are the party I met yesterday on the road; your mother rides on a bullock, does she not?"

"No, indeed!" retorted I angrily, "she rides in a palankeen, and I go with her, and father rides a large horse, and we have Chumpa and several *juwans* with us. Do you think a *pathan* like my father would let my mother ride on a bullock, like the wife of a ploughman?"

"Well, my fine little fellow, it shall be as you say, and you shall ride a large horse too, one of these days, and wear a sword and shield like me. But would you not like some sweetmeat? See how tempting those *julabees* look at the *hulwaee's*; come with me, and we will buy some."

The temptation was too strong to be withstood by a child, and after a fearful look towards the shop where we stayed, I accompanied the man to the *hulwaee's*.

He brought me a load of sweetmeats, and told me to go home and eat them; I tied them up in a handkerchief I wore round my waist, and proceeded homewards. This transaction had attracted the notice of some of the ragged urchins I had been playing with, and who had longingly eyed the *julabees* I had been treated to; and as soon as the man who had given them to me had gone a short distance, they attacked me with stones and dirt, till

one more bold than the rest seized me, and endeavoured to get my prize from me. I struggled and fought as well as I could, but the others having fairly surrounded me, I was mobbed, and obliged to deliver up my treasure. Not content with this, one big boy made a snatch at the necklace I wore, on which I began to bellow with all my might. The noise I made attracted the notice of my acquaintance, who running up, soon put the troop of boys to flight, and taking me under his charge, led me to our abode, where he delivered me up to Chumpa; at the same time telling her of the scuffle, and cautioning her not to let me out of her sight again.

I was crying bitterly, and my mother, hearing a strange voice, called me to her. Asking me what had happened, I told my story, and said that the person who had saved me was speaking to Chumpa. She addressed him from behind the cloth, which had been put up as a screen, and thanked him; and added, that my father was absent, but that if he would call again in an hour or two, he would find him at home, and she was sure he would also be glad to thank the person who had protected his child. The man said he would come in the evening, and went away. My father returned soon afterwards, and I received an admonition in the shape of a sound beating, for which I was consoled by my mother by a quantity of the sweetmeats from the *hulwaee's*, which had been the cause of my trouble, and I may add also of my present condition. You see, *sahib*, how fate works its ends out of trifling circumstances.

Towards evening my acquaintance, accompanied by another man, came. I was a good deal the subject of their conversation; but it passed on to other matters, among which I remember the word Thug to have been first used. I understood too from their discourse that there were many on the road between where we were and Indoor, and that they were cautioning my father against them. The men said that they were soldiers, who had been sent out

on some business from Indoor; and as there were a good many of their men with them, they offered to make part of our escort. My friend was very kind to me, allowed me to play with his weapons, and promised me a ride before him on his horse the next day. I was delighted at the prospect, and with him for his kind and winning manner; but I did not like the appearance of the other, who was an ill-looking fellow—I shall have to tell you much more of him hereafter.

We started the next morning. Our two acquaintances and their men joined us at a mango-grove outside the village, where they had been encamped, and we proceeded on our journey. In this manner we travelled for two days, and my friend performed his promise of taking me up before him on his horse; he would even dismount and lead him, allowing me to remain on the saddle; and as the animal was a quiet one, I used to enjoy my ride till the sun became hot, when I was put into the *dooly* with my mother. On the third day I remember my friend saying to my father, as they rode side by side,—

"Yoosuf Khan, why should you take those poor lads of yours on to Indoor with you? Why not send them back from the stage we are now approaching? I and my men are ample protection to you; and as you will belong to the same service as myself, there can be no harm in your trusting yourself and family to my protection for the rest of the journey; besides, the dangerous part of the road, the jungle in which we have been for the last two days, is passed, and the country before us is open."

"It is well said," replied my father; "I daresay the lads will be thankful to me for sparing them a part of the long march back, and they have already accompanied us some fifty or sixty *coss*."

On our arrival at the stage, my father told the lads they must return, at which they were highly pleased; and on their departure about noon, I gave many kind messages to my old companions and

play-fellows. I remember too giving an old battered rupee to be delivered to my little sister, and of saying she was to hang it with the other charms and coins about her neck, to remind her of me. I found it again, *sahib;* but, ah ! under what circumstances !

The *juwans* had been gone some hours, and it was now evening. My friend came to our abode, and told my father that the next were two short stages, and if he liked they might be made in one, as it would shorten the distance to Indoor; but that we should be obliged to start very early, long before day-light, and that the bearers who carried the *dooly* could easily be persuaded to make the march by promise of a sheep, which the *patail* of the village he proposed going to would supply free of cost, as he was a friend of his. My father seemed to be rather indignant at the idea of his taking a sheep for nothing, and said that he had plenty of money, not only to pay for a sheep, but to give them a present if they carried us quickly.

" Well," said my friend, " so much the better, for we *sipahees* have rarely much about us but our arms."

" True," replied my father; " but you know that I have sold all my property at my village, and have brought the money to aid me in our service. Indeed, it is a good round sum."

And my father chuckled at the idea.

" What ! have you a thousand rupees?" I asked, my ideas of wealth going no further.

" And what if it should be more?" said he, and the matter dropped; but even now I think I can remember that my friend exchanged significant glances with his companion.

It was then arranged that we should start with the rising of the moon, about the middle of the night.

2.—*Amir Ali loses his parents.*

We were roused from our sleep at the hour proposed; and after the men had had a pipe all round,

we set off. I was in the *dooly* with my mother. The moon had risen; but, as well as I can remember, there was but little light, and a slight rain falling, which obliged us to travel very slowly. After we had proceeded a few *coss*, the bearers of the *dooly* put it down, saying that they could not get on in the dark and the mud, and proposed to wait till daylight. My father had a violent altercation with them; and as I was now wide awake, and it had ceased to rain, I begged to be taken out of the *dooly*, and allowed to ride with my friend. He did not assent as readily as usual; yet he took me up when the bearers had been scolded into going on. I remarked to him that some of the soldiers, as I thought them, were absent. My remark attracted my father's notice to the circumstance, and he asked our companion where they were. He replied carelessly, that they were gone on in advance, as we had travelled as yet so slowly, and that we should soon overtake them.

We proceeded. We came at last to the deep bed of a river, on the side of which there was some thick jungle, when my friend dismounted, as he said to drink water, and told me the horse would carry me over safely. I guided him as well as I could; but before I had got well across the stream, I heard a cry, and the noise as if of a sudden scuffle. It alarmed me; and in looking back to see from whence it proceeded, I lost my balance on the horse, and fell heavily on the stones in the bed of the river, which cut my forehead severely. I bear the mark now.

I lay for a short time, and raising myself up, saw all the men, who I thought were far on before us, engaged in plundering the *dooly*. I now began to scream with all my might. One of them ran up to me, and I saw it was the ill-looking one I have before mentioned. "Ah! we have forgotten you," cried he; and throwing a handkerchief round my neck, he nearly choked me. Another man came up hastily,—it was my friend. "He must not be touched," he cried angrily to the other, and

seized his hands; they had a violent quarrel, and drew their swords. I can remember no more; for I was so much frightened that I lost all consciousness, and as I suppose, fainted.

I was recovered by some water being forced into my mouth; and the first objects which met my eyes were the bodies of my father and mother, with those of Chumpa and the palankeen-bearers, all lying confusedly on the ground. I cannot remember what my feelings were, but they must have been horrible. I only recollect throwing myself on my dead mother, whose face appeared dreadfully distorted, and again relapsing into insensibility. Even after the lapse of thirty-five years, the hideous appearance of my mother's face, and particularly of her eyes, comes to my recollection; but I need not describe it, *sahib;* she had been strangled! She, my father, and the whole party had come to a miserable and untimely end! I heard a narrative of the particulars of the event, many years afterwards, from an old Thug; and I will relate them in their proper place.

When I recovered my consciousness, I found myself once more before my friend who had saved my life. He supported and almost carried me in his arms, and I perceived that we were no longer on the road. We were rapidly traversing the jungle, which extended as far as I could see in every direction; but the pain of my neck was so great, that I could scarcely hold up my head. My eyes seemed to be distended and bursting, and were also very painful. With my consciousness, the remembrance of the whole scene came to my recollection, and again I fell into insensibility. I recovered and relapsed in this manner several times during this journey; but it was only momentary, only sufficient to allow me to observe that we still held on at a rapid pace, as the men on foot were between running and walking. At last we stopped, as it was now broad daylight; indeed, the sun had risen. I was taken off the horse by one of the men, and laid under a tree on a cloth spread on the ground, and

after some time my friend came to me. Desolate as I was, I could not help feeling that he must have had some concern in the death of my parents; and in my childish anger I bitterly reproached him, and bade him kill me. He tried to console me; but the more he endeavoured, the more I persisted that he should put me to death. I was in dreadful pain; my neck and eyes ached insufferably. I heaped all the abuse I could think of upon him, and the noise I made attracted the notice of the ill-looking man, whose name was Ganesha.

"What is that brat saying? Are you too turned woman," cried he fiercely, addressing the other whose name was Ismail, "that you do not put the cloth about his neck, and quiet him at once? Let me do it, if you are afraid."

And he approached me. I was reckless, and poured forth a torrent of vile abuse, and spat at him. He untied his waistband, and was about to put an end to me, when Ismail again interfered, and saved me; they had again a violent quarrel, but he succeeded in carrying me off to some little distance to another tree, where some of the band were preparing to cook their victuals; and setting me down among them, bidding them take care of me, he went away. The men tried to make me speak, but I was sullen, and would not; the pain of my neck and eyes seemed to increase, and I began to cry bitterly. I lay in this manner for some hours I suppose; and at last, completely tired out, fell asleep. I woke towards evening; and when Ismail saw me sit up, he came to me, soothed and caressed me, saying that I should henceforth be his child; and that it was not he, but others, who had murdered my parents. I remember begging him to do something for my neck, which was swelled and still very painful. He examined it, and seemed to be struck with the narrow escape I had had of my life.

He rubbed my neck with oil, and afterwards put upon it a warm plaster of leaves, which relieved it greatly, and I felt easier for its application. He

remained with me; and some of the other men, sitting down by us, began to sing and play to amuse me. I was given some milk and rice to eat in the evening; but before it was time to sleep, Ismail brought me some *sherbet* of sugar and water, which he said would make me sleep. I suppose there was opium in it, for I remember nothing till the next morning, when I found myself in his arms on horseback, and knew that we were again travelling.

I pass over the journey, as I remember nothing of it except that Ganesha was no longer with us, which I was very glad of; for I hated him, and could not bear his presence. Even in after years, *sahib*, though we have been engaged together in Thuggee, I always bore a deep-rooted aversion to him, which never changed to the last.

Ismail and seven men were all that remained of the band; and we proceeded, by long and fatiguing marches, to a village in which he said he resided, and where I was to be given up to the care of his wife. We arrived at last, and I was introduced to a good-looking young woman as a child of a relation, whom he had long ago adopted as a son, and had now brought home to her; in fine, I was formally adopted by them as their own, and my sufferings were speedily forgotten.

3.—*Amir Ali's Boyhood.*

I was kindly nursed and tended by Ismail and his wife. The curiosity of the villagers was a good deal excited by my appearance, and I have since suspected Ismail thought I might one day reveal what I knew of my origin; and for this reason I was never allowed out of his or his wife's sight. I must then, however, have speedily forgotten all about it, or at least have retained so confused and indistinct a recollection of the circumstances, that had I endeavoured to relate them to any one, I could not have made them intelligible, and should have been disregarded.

Ismail, in this village, carried on the trade of a

cloth merchant, at least when he was at home. He daily sat in his shop, with different kinds of cloth before him for sale; but it was plain, even to me, to see that he was restless and uneasy. He would very often be absent for days together, without his family knowing where he had gone; and he would suddenly return with large quantities of cloth and other goods, which were always exposed for sale. I continued to be the object of his greatest care, and I reciprocated his affection, for indeed I was more kindly treated by him than I ever had been by my father, who was a proud and ill-tempered man. My new mother, too, never gave me reason to be displeased with her; for having no child of her own, I was her pet, and she lavished on me all the means in her power. I was always well dressed, and had every indulgence that a child could wish for.

I was about nine years old, I think, when my kind protectress died of fever while Ismail was on one of his excursions, and I was taken by a neighbour to his house until he returned. I shall never forget his despair when he found his home desolate. Young as I was, I could do but little to console him; but he used to go and deck his wife's tomb with flowers every Friday, and bitter were his lamentations over her grave.

I pass over the next four or five years of my life, as I can remember no incident in them worth relating. Ismail, soon after the death of his wife, removed from the village where he had hitherto resided, and took up his abode in the town of Murnae, which was then in Scindia's possession, and I was put to school with an old man, who taught me to read and write Persian.

As I grew older, I observed that Ismail used very frequently to have a number of men at his house by night, and I was naturally curious to know who they were and why they assembled. One evening that I knew they were expected, I feigned to lie down and go to sleep as usual; but when they had all come, I got up cautiously, and hid myself be-

hind a purdah or screen at the farther end of the room where they sat. After they had eaten what was prepared for them, they all drew together, and began conversing in a language I only partially understood, and I thought this strange, as I knew Hindoostanee and the common dialect myself, having picked up the latter by associating with the boys of the town. By-and-by, Ismail went to a closet very near where I lay, and his movements alarmed me greatly, as I was fearful of being discovered; he took from it a box, which he placed in the circle, and opened it. Rich as I had always thought him, I had no idea of the wealth it contained; there were quantities of gold and silver ornaments of all kinds, with strings of pearls and other valuables; they seemed parcelled out into lots, as equally as possible, and to each man he gave one, reserving a considerable share for himself.

At last they began to speak in Hindoostanee, a language I understood. One of them, an elderly man with a venerable beard, said to Ismail.

"What do you intend doing with Ameer? He is almost a young man; and if he is to be one of us, it is high time he should be taught what to do. It is very dangerous to have him about the house; he might discover something, and be off before you knew anything of the matter."

"Oh, I have no fear of him," said Ismail; "he is too fond of me; besides, he has no other protector in the world but myself. He was the son of . . ."

And here the conversation was carried on by Ismail again in the language I did not understand.

"It does not matter," said another man, whose name was Hoosein, and whom I knew very well, as he was employed by Ismail, to all appearance, as an agent for selling his cloth; "the lad is a smart active fellow, and a great deal too knowing for you to let him go about everywhere with so little restraint; he will find out all one of these days, if he is not fairly brought among us. Besides, he is old

enough to be of use in many ways, and he ought to be instructed in our profession, if he be ever to learn; depend upon it, the sooner he eats the *goor*, the more relish he will have for it. I brought up a lad myself; and when once he got his hand in, he was a perfect tiger at the work, and became so expert, that our oldest hands could hardly compete with him."

"Well," said Ismail, "I believe you are right, and I foretell great doings from this boy. He is brave and stout beyond his years, and there are but few who can excel him in his *qusrut*, which I have taught him ever since he was a child; but he is of so kind and gentle a disposition, that I do not know how to break the matter to him. I almost fear he will never consent."

My curiosity was at the highest pitch. Who was Ismail? who were the rest? what was it I was to know, or to be taught? my mind was in a whirl. I could not sleep that night; I never closed my eyes; I seemed to be in a fever, so intense was my curiosity, and, I may say, my desire to know everything, and to become a partner with Ismail in whatever he was. Hitherto I had been looked upon, and treated as a child; now that was to be cast aside. I was, like a snake, to throw off my old skin, and to appear in a new and brighter form. Who could my parents be? I had gathered enough from the conversation, that Ismail was not my father, and I taxed my memory to recollect such portions of my previous existence as might throw some light on the subject; but all was dark within me. I could remember nothing but poor Miriam, my mother as I had used to call her; beyond this, though hard did I endeavour, I could recollect nothing. It was only in after times, as I have told you, and during a long imprisonment of twelve years, that my memory aided me.

My eyes never closed that night; when I rose in the morning, I found that Ismail and the others were gone. He did not return for some days. This was nothing uncommon, certainly; but his

proceedings had become mysterious to me for a long time before, and I could not help connecting his frequent and long absences with his true profession, whatever that might be. He could not be only a cloth merchant; there was nothing in that plodding business to hold out to him or to me the splendid hopes which Hoosein and the rest evidently entertained, and with which I had no doubt he was familiar.

Nearly a month elapsed, and after this weary time to me, Ismail returned, accompanied by Hoosein. I was consumed by my burning curiosity to know all that was hidden from me. I could not sleep at nights, and became sullen, and oppressed with thoughts which led me to no conclusions. At one time I had formed the determination to leave my father, and seek my fortune; and had actually packed up a few of my clothes, and a little money I had, and resolved to leave the town in the night, little caring where my fate should lead me; but when the time came the sense of my desolation so pressed upon me, that I abandoned the idea, and remained. I trusted to time for clearing up the mystery that hung over me, but at the same time determined that I would be more watchful over my father and his companions than I had ever been before. And many were the resolutions I made to speak to him on the subject nearest my heart; yet even when opportunities occurred, I could not bring myself to the task. It was not that I was timid—naturally I was brave—it was a mysterious consciousness that I should hear something (whenever I should hear it) that was strange, nay, fearful, that deterred me; but why this feeling should have so possessed me I cannot now tell, yet so it was.

One evening, Ismail sent for me to his sleeping-room. I had been rarely admitted to it, and my heart beat fearfully, with a presentiment that I was upon the crisis of my fate. Ismail seemed to me to be disturbed; he bade me sit down, and we sat silently for some time gazing on one another; there

was only one small oil light burning in a recess of the wall, which made the apartment very gloomy, and this trifling circumstance contributed still more to increase the morbid feeling within me. I believe I almost gasped for breath; I could bear it no longer, I arose, threw myself at his feet, and burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

"Why, Ameer, my child, my son," said he kindly and caressingly, "what is this? What has troubled you? Has some fair one bewitched you? Have you got into any difficulty while I have been away? Tell me, my boy; you know you have no one in the world so fond of you as your father, and, alas! you have now no mother."

When my feelings gave me power of utterance, fearfully I repeated to him what I had heard from him and the rest, on the memorable night I have before related. When I had finished, I rose up, and with a throbbing heart said, "I have erred, my father; my curiosity, a boy's curiosity, overcame me but since then my feelings have changed, why I know not; I am no longer a boy, for I feel that I can do anything, and only implore you to put me to the proof;" and I folded my hands on my breast, and stood silently. He was evidently much moved; dusk as it was, I could see his face working with emotions, and under expressions new to me.

At last he broke the silence, which had become to me insupportable. "My son," he said, "you know more than I had ever intended you should. I have now no alternative but to make you such as I am myself, and my knowledge of your character leads me to anticipate much from you."

"Trust me, only trust me!" I passionately exclaimed. "You shall never have cause to regret it!"

"I believe you," said he; "and now attend well to what I shall say, for upon it your future existence depends. There can be no hesitation, no falling back on the world, when once you know all You will have to undergo a trial which will stretch

your courage to its utmost. Will you go through with it? dare you to brave it?"

"I dare," cried I, for I was reckless.

He seemed to be absorbed in thought for a few moments, and then said,—

"Not to-night, but I swear to you that in three days at the farthest, I will conceal nothing from you."

I was disappointed, yet full of hope, and he dismissed me to my repose.

Ismail performed his promise. Shall I endeavour to relate what his tale was? I only hesitate, as it began by his giving me a sketch of his life.

I will omit it at present, all except his concluding words; which, with his tale of wrong, endured and revenged, made me hate the world, and cleave to Thuggee as the only profession and brotherhood in which I could hope to find good faith existing. They were these, and they have ever been indelibly impressed on my memory.

"Thus far my son, have I related some events of my life for your instruction, and I have little more to add. I need hardly now mention that I am a Thug, a member of that glorious profession which has been transmitted from the remotest periods to the few selected by Alla for his unerring purposes. In it, the Hindoo and the Moslim both unite as brothers; among them bad faith is never known: a sure proof that our calling is blessed and sanctioned by the divine authority."

"My father," said I, "you need say no more; I am yours, do as you will with me. Long ere I heard this history from you, I had overheard a conversation between Hoosein, yourself, and some others, regarding me, which has caused me great unhappiness; for I feared I was not thought worthy of your confidence, and it weighed heavily upon my mind. That was in fact the cause of the sorrow and heaviness you have remarked; and I longed for an opportunity to throw open my heart to you, and to implore of you to receive me among you. I am no longer a child, and your history has opened to

me new feelings which are at present too vague for me to describe; but I long to win fame as you have done, and long to become a member of the profession in which you describe true faith and brotherhood alone to exist. As yet I have seen nothing of the false world, and assuredly what you have said makes me still less inclined to follow any calling which would lead me to connection with it. Heartless and depraved I have heard it to be from others beside yourselves, and I feel as though I was chosen by Alla to win renown; it can only be gained by treading in your footsteps, and behold me ready to follow you whithersoever you will lead me. I have no friend but yourself, no acquaintance even have I ever formed among the youths of the village; for when I saw them following what their fathers had done, and what appeared to me low and pitiful pursuits, my spirit rose against them, and I have cast them off. My only friend is the old moolla, who would fain persuade me to become one like himself, and spend my days reading the Koran; but there is nothing stirring in his profession, though it is a holy one, and it consequently holds out no inducement to me, or any hope of gratifying the thirst for active employment which is consuming me. I have wished to become a soldier, and to enter one of the bands in the service of Scindia to fight against the unbelieving Feringhees; but this too has passed away, and now I desire nothing but to become a Thug, and follow you, my father, through the world. I will not disappoint you; my thirst for fame is too ardent for anything but death to quench it."

"May God keep it far from you," said Ismail with feeling. "You are the only solace to a life which has now no enjoyment but what is produced by the development of your thoughts and actions. I know, my son, you will not disappoint me. You see the state of prosperity I am blessed with, but you little know the power I have; my authority is owned by every Thug in this part of Hindustan and a week's notice would see a band of a thousand

men ready to obey any order I should give them. This will be proved to you in a few days, at the festival of the Dusera. We shall all assemble, at least as many as will be requisite for the opening operations of the year, which will be undertaken on a scale of unusual greatness, for we have determined to take advantage of the confusion at present produced by the wars of Holkar and Scindia with the Feringhees. We anticipate much work and a stirring season, and the men are impatient for employment, after a long period of inactivity. I will take you to Sheopoor, which we have decided on as our place of meeting, as the zemindar is friendly to us and assists us in many ways. I will introduce you to my associates and you will be initiated as a Thug in the usual manner.

Thus our conversation ended; the night had passed in its relation, and I went to rest a different being from what I had been for many days before. I rose, and found all my former energy and spirit had returned to me; and whereas a few days before I went about like a love-sick maiden, I now held up my head, threw out my chest, and felt a man. It was true I was still a boy, I was only eighteen years old, but I did not suffer my thoughts to dwell upon this; a few years, thought I, and I shall be somebody. To prove to you the excitement that possessed me, I shall relate to you the following circumstance. I might have joined in the action before, but never should have dreamed of doing the deed of daring I then did, in the presence too of men who were soldiers by profession, but who hung back at the moment of danger.

CHAPTER II.

AMIR ALI'S INITIATION INTO THUGGEE.

1.—*The boaster and the Tiger.*

It happened, a day or two after the conversation with my father which I have related, that a tigress with a cub came into a small tract of jungle which lay near our village; the first day she was seen she killed a shepherd, the second day another man who had gone to look for his body, and the third she grievously wounded the *patail* of the village, a man who was held in universal estimation, and he died during the night. A general meeting of the villagers was held at the place set apart for deliberations, and it was determined that all the active men should proceed in a body and attack the beast in her lair. The next morning we all assembled before daybreak. There was one man, a huge large-whiskered and bearded Pathan, who volunteered to be our leader; he was literally hardly able to move for the weapons he had about him. Two swords were in his belt, which also contained an assortment of daggers of various sizes and shapes; a long straight-two-edged sword hung over his left shoulder, the point of which nearly touched the ground; he had also a shield across his back, and in his right hand a matchlock with the match lighted. He addressed my father as we came up.

"*Salaam aleikoom*! Ismail Sahib," said he, "is a quiet person like you coming out with us, and the Sahib Zadah too?"

"Yes, Khan," replied my father, "it is incumbent on all good men to do their utmost in a case of need like this: who knows, if the brute is not

killed, but that some one else may become food for it?"

"*Inshalla!*" said the Khan, twisting up his moustachios and surveying himself, "we have determined that the beast dies to-day. Many a tiger has fallen from a shot from my good gun; and what is this brute that it should escape? The only fear is, that it will not stand to allow us to prove that we are men, and not dogs before it."

"As to that," said my father, "we must take our chance; but say, Khan, how will you move with all those weapons about you? Why, you could not run away, were she to rush out."

"Run away!" cried the Khan. "What are you thinking on this morning, to suppose that Dildar Khan ever turned from anything in his life? Only let it come out, I say, and you will see what use the weapons will be! Trust to me single-handed to finish it. First I shall shoot it with my match-lock; it will be wounded; then I shall advance on it thus," said he, drawing the long sword and flourishing it, at the same time twirling round and round and leaping in every possible direction.

"There!" said he quite out of breath, "there! would not that have finished it? Why I am a perfect Roostum in matters of this kind; and killing a tiger is only child's play to Dildar Khan! why I could eat one, tail and all. But come along, and when the play begins, let no one come in Dildar Khan's way," said he to the assembled group, "for *Ishanalla!* I mean to show you poor ignorant people how a tiger can be killed by a single man."

"I know the Khan to be as arrant a coward as ever breathed," said my father to me; "but come, let us see what he will do, for I confess I am anxious to behold him capering before the tigress."

"Yes," said I, "if he does perform such antics, the brute will dine on him to a certainty."

"That is no concern of ours," said my father; "it is a matter of destiny; but I would venture a great deal, he never goes within an arrow's flight of her."

We all set out headed by Dildar Khan, who still flourished his long sword, holding his matchlock in his left hand, now and then smoothing up his moustachios, which grew, or had been trained to his eyes. We soon reached the jungle, and on entering it, I thought the Khan showed signs of fear.

"The beast can be but a panther after all," said he, "and it is hardly worth the while of Dildar Khan to put himself to trouble. See, boys," continued he to some of us, "I will wait here; if it should really turn out to be a tiger you can let me know, and I will come and kill it."

Against this, however, we all protested, and declared that all would go wrong without him; and after some demur he again proceeded.

"I told you," said my father, "how it would be; but let us see how he will end the affair."

We went on till some bones and torn clothes, and the head of one of the unfortunate men who had been killed, lying near a bush, proved very plainly that the animal was not far off; and at these the Khan showed fresh signs of fear.

"They say it is a *purrut bagh*," said he, "and that it is proof against shot. Why should we risk our lives in contention with the devil?"

"*Namurd! namurd!* coward! coward!" cried some of us; "you were brave in the village; how are you now?"

"Who calls me *namurd?*" roared the Khan; follow me, and see if I am one or not," and he rushed forward, but not in the direction the tigress had gone.

"That is not the way," cried some, and at last he turned.

"This is child's play," said my father; "come, if we are to do anything, we had better set about it in good earnest."

And we went on the direction the beast had taken.

It led to an open glade, at one side of which there was a large rock, with some very thick bushes upon it.

"She is there, depend upon it," said an old

hunter; "I never saw a more likely place in my life."

We were all about thirty steps from the rock and bushes, and Dildar Khan did not at all relish his proximity to them.

"I beg to represent," said he in a low voice to us all, "that having killed so many of these brutes, I know best how to manage them, and as I am the best armed of the party, I shall take up my position near yonder bush, by which runs the pathway; she will take to it when she is driven out and then you will see the reception she will meet with from Dildar Khan. *Inshalla!* I shall present the point of my sword to her, and she will run on it, then I shall finish her with one blow of my *tegha*."

We all looked in the direction he pointed, and sure enough there was a bush, about two hundred paces off, on the pathway to the village.

"Not that one surely," said my father; "why, man, you will never see the beast from thence."

"Trust me," said the Khan, and off he went.

"I told you how it would be," continued my father; "directly he sees the animal, he will be off down the road as fast as he can. But come," said he to the men, "since the Khan thinks he will be of more use down yonder, I will lead you on, and we will see whether this eater of men cannot be got out."

We were immediately divided into three parties, one to go on either side of the bushes, the other by a circuit to get behind the rock and if possible upon it, in order to shoot her from above if she was to be seen; if not, at any rate to dislodge her by throwing stones. The arrangements were quickly completed, and though we were all within only a few yards of the bushes, there was no sign of the tigress. She expressed no displeasure at our near approach or preparations, as she had been disturbed before, and of course could not easily be driven out of her place of refuge. I was with one of the parties on the side, and had no arms but a sword and a light shield; indeed, I had gone more as a

spectator than aught else. We waited a few minutes, and one of the party who had been sent round, appeared on the top of the rock; he was soon followed by three others.

"Are you all ready?" cried one of them; "I shall heave down this stone."

"*Bismilla!* Away with it!" cried my father.

Three of them applied their strength to it, and at last it rolled over the face of the rock, and thundering down, split into a thousand fragments. There was a moment of intense anxiety and suspense, but no tigress followed.

"Try whether you cannot see her," cried my father; "if you do, fire; we are all prepared."

The men looked down in every direction, but said nothing. At last one of them was observed to be pointing to a particular spot, as though he showed the others something.

"Now," said my father, "he sees her. Look out; she will rush forth before you are thinking of her."

Every man blew his match, and planted his feet firmly. At last one of the men on the rock raised his matchlock and fired; it was answered by a tremendous roar which rent the skies, and out rushed the cub, apparently badly wounded, for before he had come a few yards he lay down and roared horribly; he was fully half-grown, and made a dreadful noise. One of the men of our party fired at him, and he did not move after the shot struck him.

"Now we shall have tough work," said my father; "she will be savage and infuriated beyond description; it is hardly safe to be here; but mind your aim, my lads, she will never reach us; I never yet missed mine, but the shot may not be fatal; so look out for yourselves."

Again my father called to the men on the rock to heave over another fragment. There was one very large one just on the brink. After a good many pushes it gave way, and as the former had done, shivered into atoms with a great noise. It was successful; the tigress rushed out towards our

side, and stood for a moment. I had never seen a tiger before, and could not help admiring her noble appearance. There she stood, her tail erect, the end of it only waving from side to side, glaring on us with her fearfully bright eyes, apparently irresolute as to what she would do, and not noticing the body of the cub, which was close to her. We were all as silent as death, each man with his matchlock to his shoulder. My father fired, and then the others; I could see the whole distinctly, for I had no gun. She staggered when my father fired, he had evidently hit her; but the rest had missed, and she charged with another tremendous roar, right at our party; but the shout we set up and the waving of our weapons turned her, and she set off at a low canter towards the bush where Dildar Khan had stationed himself.

"Now," cried my father, "coward as he is, he will be killed! she will spare nothing now! what can be done?"

By this time the other party caught a glimpse of her, and every matchlock was discharged; she must have been hit again for she stopped, turned round, growled, and showed her teeth, but again sprang forward. I imagine Dildar Khan had no idea that she was approaching him, as he had hidden himself behind the bush and could have seen nothing of what had passed. "He may escape," said my father; "it is possible yet scarcely; what can be done?" No one made a reply, but an instant afterwards I had drawn my sword, and set off at full speed after the enraged brute.

"Ameer Ali, my son! come back, come back instantly! Now, he too will perish!" cried my father in an agony of apprehension.

But I heeded not, and who of that company had my fleet foot? Yet some of them followed me. As I ran, I saw the tigress was weak, and was badly wounded, but still she ran fast. I saw her approach the bush, and the miserable man Dildar Khan rush from behind it, and stand in her very

path, with his arms stretched out apparently paralysed with fear. Another instant she had crouched as she ran, and sprang upon him; he was under her, and she fiercely tearing his body. It did not stop me; I heard the cries of those behind me to turn off, but I did not. I do not think I gave the danger a thought; if I did, the excitement overpowered it. Another bound had brought me close to the brute, whose head was down gnawing the body beneath her. I made but one stroke at her, which, praise be to God! was successful; the blade buried itself deep in the back of her neck, and she seemed to me to drop dead; I bounded off to one side, and watched for a moment. She was indeed dead, and lay, her limbs only quivering, upon the body of the man beneath her. Unfortunate coward! wounded as she was, she would not have turned after him, had he even had the presence of mind to avoid her; but he had thought to fly, and the sight of the animal had paralysed his faculties. Though all passed in a moment, methinks now, *sahib*, I see him, his eyes starting from his head, and his arms raised and expanded, as though wooing the animal's fatal embrace. Coward! had he remained behind the bush, he was safe, and might have shot her as she passed; but there he lay, a fearful spectacle, his face all bitten and lacerated, and the blood pouring from wounds in his stomach! He was quite dead. My father came up immediately; he embraced me, and burst into tears.

"How could you risk your life, my boy?" said he; "how could you be so rashly venturous of your life for so poor a wretch as he?" pointing to the body; "did I not tell you he was a coward? Yet I am proud of you now, my son, and you have shamed us all." "See!" continued he to the whole assembly, "our faces are blackened this day by a boy; who among you could have planted so well-aimed and deep a cut? See: the blade has buried itself, and is half through the bone."

That night my father said to me, "Ameer, my son, to-morrow you accompany me to Sheopoor.

I need not tell you how to-day's exploit will raise you in the eyes of your future companions."

"It was God's will," said I; "else what power had a boy like me to do such a thing?"

"You are now no child," replied my father; "you have this day, or I mistake you much, thrown off every lingering feeling of boyhood; the change has been sudden, but it has been complete, and it will last, or I mistake you much."

"You do not," I replied, "I am not what I was; to-day's is the first blood I have seen spilled; I feel that it will not be the last."

2.—*The Initiation.*

The day after my adventure with the tiger, I left our village with my father We travelled on horseback, and on the fourth morning afterwards reached Sheopoor, the town from which the grand expedition was to set out. It was here, too, that I was to be admitted into the band of Thugs, and I looked forward to my inauguration with much impatience, and perhaps some dread, for I knew not what ceremonies I had to go through.

As it still wanted two days of the festival of the Dusera, my inauguration was postponed to that day; for it is esteemed a particularly fortunate one by the Thugs, and indeed by all classes. On it, you are already aware, that all great undertakings are commenced by armies, and, in like manner, by us Thugs; for the breaking up of the rains gives a hope that the adventure will not be impeded by them; and the continuance of fine weather which follows it, allows the band to travel in comfort, and with better hope of booty from the chance of falling in with travellers, who also take advantage of the break in the weather to commence long journeys. Above all, it is a day peculiarly sacred to Bhowanee, our patroness and goddess. Still, being a Moosulman, I could not then see why such respect was paid to the festival of the Dusera, or indeed why it was kept at all; and I applied to my father for a solution of my doubts on the subject.

"It is necessary to your fully understanding this," said he, "that I should give you an outline of our belief in the divine origin of our profession, which is intimately connected with the faith of the Hindoos, by whom we Moosulmans have been instructed in the art of Thuggee."

"This is wonderful indeed," said I; "how do you reconcile any connection between the faith of unbelievers and that of the blessed prophet?"

"I cannot pretend to solve the difficulty," said my father; "but as their religion is far more ancient than ours, there are many points in it which one of the true faith may follow without offence, so that he does not join them in all their forms and professions. Indeed, this is impossible, as no one can become a Hindoo; but as I told you before, Thuggee is one of the means by which *Allah* works out his own ends; and as the profession of it has been handed down to us from ages, and becomes the fate of those who are called to follow it, there is no possibility of avoiding the profession though one desired to do so. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly," said I; "it was not to question its propriety that I asked the question, but only to know how it was that Hindoo festivals were acknowledged and kept by us Moosulmans."

"The Dusera is the only one," said my father, "which is observed; and the reason of this is, that, it is the fittest time of the year to commence our enterprises, and has been invariably kept sacred by all Hindoo Thugs. But I must tell you of the origin of Thuggee, that you may judge for yourself how ancient it is. In the beginning of the world, according to the Hindoos, there existed a creating and a destroying power, both emanations from the Supreme Being. These were, as a matter of consequence, at constant enmity with each other, which still continues. The creative power, however, peopled the earth so fast that the destroyer could not keep pace with him, nor was he allowed to do so; but was given permission to resort to every means he could devise to effect his objects.

Among others, his consort Devee, Bhowanee, or Kalee, for she is known under these names and many others, constructed an image, into which, on this occasion, she was empowered to infuse the breath of life. No sooner was this effected, than she assembled a number of her votaries, whom she named Thugs. She instructed them in the art of Thuggee; and to prove its efficiency, with her own hands destroyed before them the image she had made, in the manner which we now practise. She endowed the Thugs with superior intelligence and cunning, in order that they might decoy human beings to destruction, and sent them abroad into the world, giving them, as the reward of their exertions, the plunder they might obtain from those they put to death; and bidding them be under no concern for the disposal of the bodies, as she would herself convey them from the earth. Ages passed on in this manner, and she protected her votaries from human laws, and they were everywhere found to be faithful: but corruptions crept in among them with the increased depravity of the world; and at last, a gang more bold and curious than the rest, after destroying a traveller, determined, instead of following the old custom of leaving the body unnoticed, to watch and see how it was disposed of. They hid themselves, as they thought, secure from observation in the bushes by the side of the road, and waited the arrival of the goddess. But what mortal can escape the eye of Divinity? She quickly espied them, and called them before her. Terror-stricken by her splendid and terrific appearance, and in the utmost dread of her vengeance, they attempted to fly; but she arrested their steps, and in an awful manner upbraided them for their want of faith.

"You have seen me," said she, "and looked upon a power which no mortal has ever yet beheld without instant destruction; but this I spare you; henceforward, however, I shall no longer protect you as I have done. The bodies of those whom you destroy will no longer be removed by me, and

you must take your own measures for their concealment. It will not always be effectual, and will often lead to your detection by earthly powers, and in this will consist your punishment. Your intelligence and cunning still remain to you. I will in future assist you by omens for your guidance; but this my decree will be your curse to the latest period of the world."

"So saying, she disappeared, and left them to the consequences of their own folly and presumption; but her protection has never been withdrawn. It is true, the remains of those who fall by our hands are sometimes discovered, and instances have been known of that discovery having led to the apprehension of Thugs, at least so I have heard; but during my life-time I have never known of one, and it is my firm belief that such instances have been permitted on purpose to punish those who have in some way offended our protectress, by neglecting her sacrifices and omens. You therefore see how necessary it is to follow the rules which have guided our fraternity for ages, and which cannot be changed without incurring the displeasure of the Divine power; nor is there anything in our creed to forbid it. We follow the blessed precepts of our prophet; we say our *Namaz* five times a day; we observe all the rules of our faith; we worship no idols; and if what we have done for ages, ever since the invasion of India by our fore-fathers, was displeasing to the apostle, surely we should have had, long ere this, some manifestation of his displeasure. Our plans would have been frustrated, our exertions rendered of no avail; we should have dragged on a miserable existence and, long ere this, should have abandoned Thuggee, and our connection with its Hindoo professors."

"I am convinced," said I; "for your relation is wonderful. Truly have you said that we are under the especial protection of Providence; and it would be sinful to question the propriety of any usages which have been transmitted from a period so remote, and followed without deviation."

On the day of the Dusera the ceremony of my inauguration as a Thug commenced. I was bathed and dressed in new clothes which had never been bleached, and led by the hand by my father, who officiated as the gooroo, or spiritual director, and to whom seemed to be confided the entire direction of the ceremonies. I was brought into a room, where the leaders of the band I had before seen were assembled, sitting on a clean white cloth, which was spread in the centre of the apartment. My father then, advancing towards them, asked them whether they were content to receive me as a Thug and a brother, to which they all answered, "We are."

I was then conducted into the open air, accompanied by the whole number, when my father, raising his hands and eyes to the sky, cried in a loud voice, "O Bhowanee! mother of the world! whose votaries we are, receive this thy servant—vouchsafe to him thy protection—grant to us an omen which may assure us of thy consent!"

We waited for some time; and at last, from a tree over our heads, the loud twittering of the small tree-owl was heard.

"*Jey Bhowanee!* Victory to Bhowanee!" cried the whole of the leaders; and my father embraced me, saying,—

"Be of good cheer, my son; the omen is most favourable. We could hardly have expected such an one; thy acceptation is complete."

I was then reconducted to the apartment, and a pickaxe, that holy symbol of our profession, was placed in my right hand, upon a white handkerchief. I was desired to raise it as high as my breast; and an oath, a fearful oath, was then dictated to me, which I repeated, raising my left hand into the air, and invoking the goddess to whose service I was devoting myself. The same oath was repeated by me on the blessed *Koran*, after which a small piece of consecrated *goor*, or coarse sugar, was given to eat, and my inauguration was complete.

My father received the congratulations of the assembly on the fortunate issue of the ceremony, and he then addressed me as follows :—

" My son, thou hast taken upon thee the profession which is of all the most ancient and acceptable to the Divinity. Thou hast sworn to be faithful, brave, and secret; to pursue to destruction every human being whom chance, or thy ingenuity, may throw into thy power, with the exception of those who are forbidden by the laws of our profession, which are now to thee sacred. These are particular sects, over whom our power does not extend, and whose sacrifice is not acceptable to our Divine patroness; they are Dhobees, Bhats, Sikhs, Nanukshahees, Mudaree Fukeers, dancing-men, musicians, Bhungees, Tailees, Lohars, Burraes, and maimed or leprous persons. With these exceptions, the whole human race is open to thy destruction, and thou must omit no possible means (but at all times dependent upon the omens by which we are guided), to compass their destruction. I have now finished; thou art become a Thug; and what remains of thy profession will be shown to thee by our gooroo, who will, under the necessary ceremonies, instruct thee in its details."

" It is enough," said I; " I am yours to death; and I only pray that an opportunity may soon be afforded me to prove to you my devotion."

Thus I became a Thug. Had I commenced my career under other and ordinary circumstances,—I mean, had I not been introduced to my profession by one so powerful and well esteemed as my father then was,—I must have entered the lowest grade of all; and had I proved myself to be active, intelligent, and brave, I might have risen in time to the highest. But this was spared me; and though too young myself to become a leader, I was in a rank above the rest, and was considered to be, and looked up to as, the person who was hereafter to fill my father's place, whenever it should suit him to retire from active employment.

3.—*Amir Ali Witnesses a Crime.*

The business which the Thug leaders had assembled to deliberate upon, was a plan of my father's for a large body under himself and two other leaders (one of whom was Hoosein), to take the high road to the Dukhun; to advance together as far as Nagpoor, from whence my father was to proceed to Hyderabad and the others separating, one to go to Aurungabad, thence through Khandesh by Boorhanpoor, to Indore, and back to Sheopoor; the other also to Aurungabad, but from thence to Poona; afterwards, if possible as far as Surat, and from thence homewards; but if the season should be too far advanced, they were to get to Boorhanpoor and home the best way they could; finally, we were all to meet at Sheopoor by the commencement of the next rainy season.

No opposition was made to this; on the contrary it was highly approved of, as, under the personal direction of Ismail, it could not fail of success, and as an expedition had not been made to the Dukhun for many years before. The other gangs were to proceed in various directions about Hindoostan as far as Benares, and round through the Saugor and Nerbudda country,—their proceedings to be guided by circumstances, which could not now be foreseen.

Thus planned, but a few days elapsed before we set off on our journey. With us there were sixty men, with Hoosein forty-five, and with the other jemadar, whose name was Ghous Khan, thirty; making in all one hundred and thirty-five.

Before we commenced our journey, however, it was necessary to consult the omens; and as the ceremonies are somewhat curious, I shall relate them to you,—observing, that no expedition, whether of a large or small body, can be undertaken without them.

The morning we were to separate on our different destinations, everything having been duly prepared, we repaired to a spot which had been chosen

on the road, a short distance from the village, and the whole band was in attendance. Bhudrinath, a man of much intelligence and respectability, who was learned in the conducting of ceremonies, bore the sacred pickaxe, which had been previously duly consecrated, and was immediately attended by my father and three other jemadars. My father, as the leader of the whole, carried a *lota* filled with water, suspended by a string which he held in his mouth, down his right side. Had that *lota* fallen, what a dire omen would it have been to him! Nothing could have averted his death in that year, or at furthest in the year following.

We moved slowly, till we reached the spot fixed on, and there my father stood. Turning his face to the south, the direction we were to take, he placed his left hand on his breast, reverently lifted his eyes to heaven, and pronounced in a loud voice the following invocation to Bhowanee:—

"Mother of the Universe! Protectress and Patroness of our Order! if this expedition be pleasing to thee, vouchsafe us thy help, and give us an omen of thine approbation!"

He was silent, and every mouth repeated the prayer aloud.

Now everyone looked impatient for the omens; the band scarcely breathed, so intensely anxious was the suspense. Long we waited, perhaps half an hour; no one spoke; and the reverent silence of the assembled numbers had something exceedingly impressive in it. At last the *pilhoo*, or omen on the left hand, was vouchsafed: a jackass brayed, and was almost instantly answered by one on the right, which was the *thiboo*. What could have been more complete! such an omen had not been known for years, and promised the utmost success, and splendid booty. Loud and fervent were the cries of praise to Bhowanee; and each turning to his companion, congratulated him on the prospect.

Seven long hours my father sat on that spot, during which time all was prepared for the journey.

At its expiration he arose, and we took the nearest road to Guneshpoor.

At the stage where we stopped for the evening, the *thiboo* and *pilhoo* were heard by Bhudrinath, who carried the *nishan*, the pickaxe, or as it was now called, having been consecrated, *khussee;* and these renewed favourable omens produced an increased confidence in the expedition and its leaders. At the first streamlet we passed the next morning, the band all sat down, and some *goor* and *dall*, which had been brought with us, was shared to all. Proceeding, favourable omens were again seen, and all declared that we should speedily gain a rich booty.

In a few days we arrived at Guneshpoor, and as yet we had no adventure. On reaching the town, the *sothaees* or inveiglers, whose duty it is to entice travellers into the power of the Thugs, were sent into the town, while we remained under a mango-grove on the outside. They were absent most part of the day; and when they returned, they were eagerly questioned for intelligence. The men who had been sent on this duty were two Hindoos, one by name Bhudrinath, whom I have mentioned before, a Brahmin, and other a man of inferior caste, by name Gopal; but both were persons of the most bland and persuasive manners, and I was told that they rarely failed in their object. I was, among the rest, highly curious to hear their adventures in the town, and joined my father on his taking his place in the assembly.

Bhudrinath told us, that he had gone through the whole of the bazaar without success, when he was attracted to a bunnea's shop by a respectable old man, who was in high dispute with the bunnea. He went up to him, and the old gentleman, who was in a violent passion at some attempted exaction on the part of the merchant, immediately accosted him, and begged him to be witness to the transaction expressing at the same time his intention of having the man brought before the kotwal for his dishonesty.

"The *bunnea* was very insolent and abusive," Bhudrinath went on to say; "and after some altercation, I contrived to settle the matter by dint of threats and persuasions. The old man seemed highly pleased with me; and it naturally led, after we left the shop together, to a conversation about whither I was going, and who I was. I took advantage of this, to convince him that the town was no safe residence for a traveller, even for a night, and discovered that he was a Persian *mootsuddee* or writer in the service of the Rajah of Nagpoor, whither he was travelling with his son.

"I of course alarmed him as much as I could with accounts of the thieves and Thugs on the road, and represented ourselves to be a company of travellers proceeding also to Nagpoor, on our way to the Dukhun, and associated together for mutual protection; and that we always rested outside the villages, as being the safest places when our number was so large. He seemed so struck with the proposal I made to him to come out and join us, that I lost no time in pressing him to leave the town, and I have succeeded. I have left Gopal, who joined us, to show him the way out, and assist him in packing up his things, and I have no doubt they will be here before sunset."

The *khayet* came into our camp, as he had said, by sunset, and was met at the confines of it by my father and the two other jemadars. The respectability of his appearance struck me forcibly; he was evidently a man of polished manners, and had seen courts and good society. After arranging his travelling cart to sleep in, he and his son, an intelligent handsome-looking youth, came to the spot where my father and the other leaders had spread their carpets; and many of the band being assembled, there ensued a general conversation.

Who could have told, *sahib*, the intentions of those by whom he was surrounded? To me it was wonderful. I knew he was to die that night, for that had been determined when he arrived in our camp, and while he was arranging his sleeping-

place. I knew too that a spot had been fixed on for his grave, and that of those with him; for I had accompanied my father to it, and saw that it was begun; and yet there sat my father, and Hoosein, and Ghous Khan, and many others. The pipe and the story passed round, and the old man was delighted at the company he had fallen into.

He continued a relation of some treaties the Nagpoor Rajah was forming with the English, and was blaming him for entering into any league with them against his brethren, when my father called out "*Tumbako lao* (bring tobacco)!" It was the signal. Quicker than thought one of the Thugs had thrown his handkerchief round the neck of the old man, another one round that of the son, and in an instant they were on their backs struggling in the agonies of death. Not a sound escaped them but an indistinct gurgling in their throats; and as the *bhuttotes* quitted their fatal hold after a few moments, others who had been waiting for the purpose, took up the bodies and bore them away to the already prepared grave.

Sahib, can I describe to you how I passed that night! Do what I would, the father and son appeared before me; the old man's voice rung in my ears, and the son's large eyes seemed to be fixed on mine. I felt as though a thousand devils sat on my breast, and sleep would not come to my eyes. It appeared so cold-blooded, so unprovoked a deed, that I could not reconcile myself in any way to have become even a silent spectator of it. Yet my father had joined in it, my father whom I loved intensely, and Hoosein too. But all would not do; I could not tranquillize myself. I crept from beneath our little tent, and sat down in the open air. The moon shone brightly as ever, as now and then she emerged from beneath a passing cloud, and there was a cool breeze which fanned my burning face and soothed me. I watched her as she appeared to travel along in the heavens till she became overcast; and a few heavy drops of rain, as if she wept over the deed she had witness-

ed, drove me again under the tent. I crept close to my father, who was sound asleep, and embracing him with my arms sleep came to my eyelids, and I woke not till the usual hour of prayer arrived, when I was roused by my father to join in the morning supplication.

We spread our carpets, and I repeated the form with him; but my thoughts were with the old man and his son, and the event of the preceding night.

CHAPTER III.

How Amir Ali Killed His First Man.

1.—*The Preparations.*

Nothing of any moment occurred during the rest of our march to Nagpoor.

Outside the city is a large tank, on the margin of which the majority of the band encamped. My father and a few others put up in the town, for the purpose of converting the booty already obtained into money. It was not a difficult task, for as the property which had belonged to Brij Lall was easily saleable, we soon found purchasers among the numerous goldsmiths and *sahoukars* of the city.

In one of his dealings with a *sahoukar*, my father casually stated that he was proceeding to Hyderabad with some men he had brought from his village, and for whom he was in hope of procuring employment under, as he said, his brother, who was in the service of the then reigning prince Sikundur Jah. The *sahoukar* at once proposed to accompany us, and to give my father and his men a handsome remuneration if he would protect him on the road; as he had, he said, been for some time on the look-out for an opportunity to put himself under the escort of a respectable man who might be travelling there with a number of followers.

At that time, *sahib*, in consequence of the unsettled state of the country, and the many rumours there were of wars, any man of respectability, who was idle in his village, and could persuade a few companions to accompany him as their leader, was sure of employment as a soldier, if he presented himself at any of the courts of Hindustan or the

Dukhun. Sindea, Holkar, the Peshwah, every prince in fact had a large army which was tolerably paid; and it was better to serve with them, than to pursue any other occupation. We had met several bands of such men on our road down to Nagpoor, so that our company presented no extraordinary or suspicious appearance, especially under my father, who looked like a soldier, was always well armed and dressed, rode a fine horse, and on occasions of residing in, or even passing through, a city, was always attended by a number of the *Thugs* as his escort; and his appearance was certainly what he represented himself to be to the *sahoukar*.

My father readily agreed to the *sahoukar's* terms, and bound himself down in a day or two afterwards to be at his disposal, and to afford him protection as far as Hyderabad. At a secret conference they had that day, the *sahoukar*, as my father told me, informed him that he was going to take down a good deal of treasure, some valuable jewels and some merchandise, by which he hoped to get a handsome profit at Hyderabad. Nay, he even went so far as to show him what he was going to take with him; and you cannot imagine, *sahib*, the joy that was diffused in our camp at the certainty of so rich a booty.

We expected the *sahoukar* anxiously all the day, and just at nightfall he came to our camp in a small travelling cart, with one or two servants and two or three small ponies, on which a tent and his baggage were laden, and ten bullocks with their two drivers. Altogether, there were eight men, including himself.

We saw but little of him during our march to Oomraotee; my father and Hossein used sometimes to sit with him in his tent during the evening, and I was also introduced to him. He was a large, unwieldy man, and I began to think whether he would not be a good subject for my first trial. I mentioned my thoughts to my father, and he was much pleased with me.

"I had intended to have appointed you to be

his bhuttote," said he; "he is too fat to make any resistance, and he will be the easier work for you, who have not as yet tried what you can do."

So from that time I looked upon him as my first victim.

I pass over our journey, as nothing worth mentoning occurred on the road. We arrived at the town, and took up our quarters in the bazaar. I was much struck with its apparent opulence and prosperity; but it was not to be wondered at, as it was the place where all the merchandise and manufacture of Hindustan were brought to be distributed over the Dukhun, and where all the spices, drugs, and other articles of trade arrived from the south, to be sent to different parts of Hindustan.

The town seemed to be full of *sahoukars'* houses and large shops; and in the bazaars were displayed every article that I had ever heard of, besides many others from the Europeans at Bombay which I had never seen before; and I wandered about every day in company with my father, admiring and wondering at all I saw.

The *sahoukar's* business detained him some days at this place, at the end of which we again set forward, with an addition to his people of three men, who drove a few bullocks heavily laden with cloths, which we heard were of the most costly description, being those of Benares, which are justly celebrated for their richness and beauty. Nor did this addition at all disconcert our plans, for in consequence of the *sahoukar* having accompanied us, Hoosein's party still remained; and, indeed, if it had not, there were plenty of my father's to have secured the whole without trouble.

From Oomraotee to Mungloor is three stages, and "there," said my father, "I shall decide on the place for the ending of this matter. If I remember right, there are some low hills and ravines not far beyond it, which will give us excellent opportunities for concealing the bodies. And do you, Hoosein inquire who among your men know the

ground, for it will be necessary to send someone with the lughaees."

I now felt that my time had come; that in a very few hours I might take my place with the rest, having established my right to be their equal.

Perhaps it was weakness, *sahib*, but from that time I avoided the sight of the *sahoukar* as much as possible. I saw him once or twice on the road; but an involuntary shudder crept through me, and, like a fool, I almost wished I were back again at our village. But it was too late to retract; I had a character to gain, and the esteem of him who best loved me, my father, to secure.

We reached Mungloor. It is a large town, full of Mahomedans, and celebrated for the shrine of Meer Hyat Kalundur, a saint of great antiquity. His tomb is held in particular veneration, and it was judged highly expedient that we should offer up our prayers for the success of our enterprise.

After prayers we returned to the place where we had put up, and found a man belonging to the *sahoukar* waiting for us. He said his master would stay that evening where he was, with a friend, instead of coming outside the village to our encampment, but that my father was to leave some men with him as a guard; and that he would set out early in the night, as he was determined to go on to Bassim, a town some distance off, where he had another friend, whom he wished to visit; that as it was so long a march we must start early, so as to allow time for a halt for refreshment at a village half-way.

My father did not like the idea of sending the men into the village, lest they should be recognised as Thugs; yet he could not but acquiesce, and some were sent as soon as night closed in, that there might be hardly a chance of their being known. In the meantime every preparation was made by the party of gravediggers who were to precede us, and at nightfall they also left the ground, fourteen in number, with the two who knew the spot in company with them. They were confident as to the

precise place they should fix on and described the hills as little more than low mounds, caused by some high land breaking into ravines; that, if they remembered right, the road was very stony; and crossed by several small streams, whose banks were lined by thick brush-wood, and that in any one of these in which there might be no water, the *bhil*, or grave, should be prepared. They were also desired to place men in advance to give information, that we might all take our places, and fall on, when the signal was given.

2.—*The Deed of Darkness.*

It was now generally known to all that I was to have the *sahoukar* to myself, and many thronged about me to see how I looked forward to my first trial; every one cheered me, and I must own this gave me great confidence.

We were all soon assembled, and the *gooroo* led the way into an adjoining field. He stopped, and turning to the direction in which we were to proceed, raised his hands in a supplicatory manner, and cried, "*O Kalee! Maha Kalee!* If the traveller now with us should die by the hand of this thy new votary vouchsafe us the *thiboo!*"

All of us stood silently; and wonderful to relate even at that late hour an ass brayed on the right hand. The *gooroo* was overjoyed.

"There!" cried he to the others, "was there ever so complete an acceptation of a votary? The omen almost followed the prayer."

"*Shookr Alla!*" exclaimed my father, "it is now complete; he will go forth and conquer. There only remains for you to tie the knot."

"That I will do when we return," said the *gooroo;* and when we reached our encampment, he took my handkerchief, and untying the knot which had been previously made, he retied it, placing a piece of silver in it. Presenting it to me, he said,—

"Receive this now sacred weapon; put your trust in it; in the holy name of *Kalee* I bid it do your will."

I received it in my right hand, and carefully tucked it into my waistband, that I might not lose it, and that it might be ready for action when required.

We remained in conversation for some time, and then threw ourselves on our carpets to snatch a short rest, till one of our men from the village came and told us that the *sahoukar* was preparing to move, and had sent him on to warn us.

The band were quickly roused and our beasts laden, and we drew up by the side of the road to await his arrival. He was not long in coming, and we all moved on together.

We had proceeded about two *coss*, when there was a murmur among the men who led, and one of the scouts was an instant afterwards seen making his way to where we were. My father recognised him as one of those he had sent on.

"*Bhilla manjeh?*" [Have you cleared the hole?] he eagerly inquired.

"*Manjeh!*" said the man. "It is cleared, and it is all ready. See you, yon low hills? A streamlet, as I told you, runs from them; and it is a rare *bhil* that we have made, Jemadar Sahib. You will say we have done well."

"And how far may it be?" demanded my father.

"About half a *coss*," said the man. A short distance from hence, the road becomes stony, and continues so till you are above the pass—take advantage of it;" and he fell in among the others.

As we approached the small hills, the jungle became pretty thick, and appeared doubly so by the moonlight, and we passed many places where I thought the deed might have been done with advantage. But I was wrong, for the *lughaees* had selected an admirable one.

A man came from the front, whispered a few words to my father, and again went on. This increased my anxiety. We crossed a small hollow, ascended a bank, and below us I saw what I was sure was the place. The banks of the rivulet were high and steep, covered with thick underwood matted by trailing creepers. A few higher trees

nearly met over its bed, in which could be just discerned a small thread of water, looking like a silver snake as the moon's rays fell on it through the dark foliage. A hundred thieves might lie there, thought I; and who could ever know the fate of a traveller who might so easily be surprised in such a spot?

I was roused from my train of thought by my father, as he called out "*Hooshiaree!*" (caution). This was the preparatory signal. He went to the side of the cart, and represented to the *sahoukar* that we had reached the stream, and that the bank was so steep, and the bed so stony, that he must get out and walk over to the other side, if no farther. This was quite sufficient; the man got out, and after seeing the cart safely down the steep bank was preparing to follow himself.

The whole scene is now before me. The bullocks and their drivers, with the Thugs, were all in a confused group in the bed of the little stream, the men shouting and urging on their beasts; but it was easy to see that every man had a Thug close to him awaiting the signal. They were only a few feet below us, and the stream was so narrow that it was with some difficulty all could stand in its bed, especially when the cart reached the bottom. Above, stood my father, Hoosein, and myself, the *sahoukar*, one of his servants, and several Thugs.

I was eagerly waiting the signal; I tightly grasped the fatal handkerchief, and my first victim was within a foot of me! I went behind him as being preferable to one side, and observed one of the other Thugs do the same to a servant. The *sahoukar* moved a step or two towards the road—I instinctively followed him; I scarcely felt that I stirred, so intensely was I observing him. "*Jey Kalee!*" shouted my father: it was the signal, and I obeyed it!

As quick as thought the cloth was round his neck; I seemed endued with superhuman strength. I wrenched his neck round—he struggled convulsively for an instant, and fell.

"You have done well," said my father in a low and kind voice; "you will receive the reward of this soon. Now follow me, we will go to the grave. Ere this the bodies have been collected, and I myself must see that they are properly disposed of. There will be a noise about this business, and it will need great exertion for us to get out of the road we are now travelling."

The banks of the rivulet were perhaps two or three yards high, and the bed was so narrow that but two persons could advance abreast. The creepers and trees were matted overhead, and the sides so thick that it was impossible that any one could have got down from above. The tangled character of the spot increased as we proceeded, until it became necessary to free our clothes from the thorns which caught us at every step. In a few moments we heard the sound of voices, and after creeping almost on all fours through a hole which had apparently been forced through the underwood, we came upon the grave.

There was only one; it occupied almost the entire breadth of the stream; it was very deep, and the earth, or rather sand, had been thrown out on each end. The *lughaees* were sitting there; but they could scarcely be seen from the darkness of the place, which the thick wood above only partially allowed the moon-beams to penetrate. They were conversing in a low tone in the slang of the band, which I had not yet learned; my father spoke to them, or rather to their leader.

"You have had your wits about you," he said, "and we will think well of you when we make the distribution; this is a grave that even a jackal could not discover. Again I say, Peer Khan, you have done this properly, and it is well I have seen it that I may speak of you as you deserve; but you must be quick,—the night advances."

"It is finished, *khodawund*," replied the man. "We do but wait for another body which they say is coming, and the filling up will be done immediately."

As he spoke, the body of the *sahoukar* was brought up by three men, who railed at it for its weight.

"It is their wont," he said. "Do not speak to them; only watch what they do; for you must see all, that you may be fully acquainted with your duties."

When all was finished, quantities of stones which had been collected were thrown upon the bodies, afterwards thorns, and the whole was covered up with sand, which was carefully smoothed.

CHAPTER IV.

FRESH ADVENTURES.

1.—*Amir Ali Completes his Initiation.*

To arrange our future proceedings was by no means an easy matter, as it was necessary to get past Bassim, where the *sahoukar* had friends, and his cart and bullocks might possibly be recognised in the town. My father's advice was to travel till daylight, and then to withdraw to one side of the road as far from observation as possible; to remain there as long as we could, and then to push on beyond Bassim. At this halt too there was to be a grand division of the spoil, at least as much of it as could be divided; and Hoosein's party was to separate from us and pursue their road in the best way they could, in the direction which had been pointed out to them. Accordingly we again started, and after passing some villages halted about sunrise at some distance from the road, near a grove of trees, in which there was a well of water. Before the men betook themselves to cooking their meal after the march, they were all assembled : and a quantity of *goor* having been brought, the ceremony of the *tupounee* was performed as I have before described. I was now entitled to a seat on the blanket with the other *bhuttotes* : I was their equal ! The ceremony ended, I untied the knot of my handkerchief, as directed by my father, and taking out the piece of silver, presented it with some rupees to my *gooroo*, touching his feet at the same time in reverence. This was the last of my ceremonies of initiation. I was a *bhuttote*, had fairly killed my man, and held myself to be the equal of any of my associates.

After this my father and Hoosein brought forth all the plunder of our late enterprise. It was magnificent. There was a good quantity of gold and silver in money; but the principal valuables were the jewels which the *sahoukar* was taking to Hyderabad for sale, and the cloths and brocades on the bullocks—they were of the richest description.

The distribution of these was a matter of great difficulty, and it was impossible to satisfy every one; besides, the pearls and diamonds would have lost a great deal of their value by being divided among the men. So it was agreed to share the ready money, cooking utensils, and other effects of the *sahoukar,* also the least valuable cloths, into two equal portions as nearly as possible, in proportion to the number of men of each band; that my father was to have charge of the jewels, which he was to sell at Hyderabad to the best advantage, as also of the most valuable cloths; and that the proceeds of these were not to be divi 'ed until we again reached our place of *rendezvous.*

The division of the ready money, upwards of three thousand five hundred rupees, gave to each man a considerable sum, enough at any rate to support him for some time, the more especially as the share of the former booty was not nearly expended; for every man lived as frugally as possible, and all seemed intent upon vying with each other as to who should have the largest share at the general division. Nay, many even denied themselves the meanest luxuries, and it was not uncommon to see a man eating his cakes without *ghee,* or anything but pure water.

Bhudrinath, however, one of the most skilful of the band was a complete exception to what I have said. He was a short, stout, active fellow, a man who aspired to be *jemadar,* and with some reason. I have mentioned him before as the bearer of the sacred pickaxe. He was one of the most enterprising among us, and had conducted small expeditions, in which he had acquitted himself much to the satisfaction of those who had entrusted him with them.

It was curious to see that man eat. He consumed every day that he could get it, two seers of flour made into cakes, a quarter of a seer of *ghee* (clarified butter), and a large pot of milk containing upwards of a seer. It seemed impossible that one man could demolish the pile of cakes when he had baked them, and fairly sat down to eat them; but one by one they disappeared, accompanied by such draughts of water as would alone have filled any ordinary person. Towards the end of the pile, however, it was easy to see that his jaws could hardly perform their office, and it was almost painful to behold the distension of his stomach. He would stretch himself first on one side, then on the other; get up and stroke down the mass collected, apparently from his throat downwards, and again essay to finish what remained; and after many attempts he would sometimes succeed.

We often jeered at him on his enormous consumption of food; but he used to declare that nothing under the daily allowance I have mentioned could satisfy him, or enable him to perform his duty.

Our encampment broke up towards evening. Friends were seen embracing each other, and wishing mutual success; at length they all departed. We watched them over the brow of an eminence not far on, and then started ourselves. Leaving the beaten road to Bassim, we struck off into one to the left; and as it promised to lead to some large town we followed it, as well to avoid discovery as to court new adventures. By the light of a bright moon we travelled most of the night, passing through a dreary country, in many parts covered with jungle, and never entering a village save to ask the road, or to get fire to light our *hookas*.

In this manner, and without knowing where the road we had taken would lead us, we travelled for some days; and as we had purposely avoided the principal roads, it was not to be expected that we should meet with anything in the way of adventure, or

with any travellers whom we could entice into our society. At last we came upon a broader road than that on which we had been travelling; and as we had left every danger from our late deed far behind us, we determined to follow it, in the hope that it would lead us towards Hyderabad, or some large village in its direction, from whence we could get upon a well-travelled road and carry on our vocation. As it was, we had gained a respectable booty even for a whole season; but scarcely two months had passed, and we could not afford to go on so far as Hyderabad in inactivity.

The road led us on for some hours till large mango groves, with here and there the white top of a Hindoo temple peeping over them, gave us intimation that we were approaching a place of consequence. It turned out to be the town of Oomerkhér, a wealthy place surrounded with most luxuriant cultivation of wheat and other descriptions of grain.

"It will be our own fault," said my father, "if we find not some game here. Having encamped on the other side of the town the *sothaees* must carefully pass through the bazars, and this evening may bring us booty enough to recompense us for staying here."

The duty of a *sotha* was one which I had also to learn. Men were even more proud of excelling in it, than in that of a *bhuttote;* for it required the greatest tact and powers of dissimulation, ability to support characters and disguises; a smooth tongue and polite demeanour. Bhudrinath was one who united all in an eminent degree; he was a short, stout, active man as I have mentioned, but extremely handsome, and with a most winning manner. It was his constant boast that he never marked out a victim whom he did not strangle with his own hands.

We passed through the town, describing ourselves as merchants from Hindostan: and as the bales of cloth when stopped by the collector of tolls were readily shown by my father and the duty demanded

on them cheerfully paid, our assertion was credited, we were civilly treated by the authorities, and shown an excellent piece of ground for our encampment.

"Now dress yourself in your best clothes," said Bhudrinath, "and come with me into the town. Remember, your father is a merchant, you are a *jemadar* commanding his escort. I am a *bhula admee* (respectable person) belonging to you. We will take with us Peer Khan, who although a *lugha* is an excellent *sotha*, and a respectable fellow when he is dressed and armed; and it is hard if we do not pick up somebody."

2.—*The Unfortunate Merchant.*

We entered the town, and betook ourselves to the *chowree* where the *kotwal* and some respectable persons were sitting, surrounded by a few armed men as is usual. As we passed by them we were invited to enter, and received with great politeness. I was placed in the seat of honour by Bhudrinath, who took his station at some distance. A desultory conversation began. My father's name was asked, where he was going, and what he had brought for trade, who we were, and in short the general object of our journey by, as they told us, an unfrequented road, at least from Hindustan. The tone in which the question was asked seemed to me so suspicious, that I thought for an instant we were suspected, and I was endeavouring to frame a reply, when Bhudrinath stopped me.

"I represent," said he, addressing the man who had asked the question, "that we were set astray at that abode of unsainted people, Nagpoor. Either with a view to deceive us, or perhaps of robbing us, persons from whom we asked information, told us the best and most frequented road was by this place; and truly the town you have the fortune to dwell in is a place of great beauty and fertility, and is evidently in the hands of a most wise governor, and one who protects his people. How, *Jemadar Sahib*, have I not said truly?"

"Yes," said I, "we shall only be too glad to lay

our *nuzzurs* at the feet of this patron of yours; and no doubt we shall see in him a pattern of noblemen, a specimen of what we may expect to see at the capital of the Dukhun. When may we hope to be admitted to the presence?"

"In the evening, after prayers," replied our acquaintance; "it is then that justice is dispensed to these poor unbelieving cultivators, and the durbar is enlivened by the presence and heavenly music of a set of dancing-women, whom my lord has brought with him from the city."

"We will come," said I; "and I pray you to give your lord notice that we have accepted your invitation to visit him; nay, that we are desirous of paying our respects to him."

As I finished speaking, an elderly man of decent appearance had entered the *chowree;* he was a Hindoo, and looked like a merchant. He demanded in rather a peremptory tone, a place to rest in, declaring that if he did not get it immediately he would go and complain to the ruler of the town.

The spirit of the old *kotwal* seemed to be roused by the man's behaviour, and he declared in round terms that he would not give a foot of ground, or an empty shop, without he was civilly asked.

The man looked irresolute for an instant, then walked sulkily out. Bhudrinath gave me a sign, and we took our leave. We had scarcely got out, when he said, "That man is ours; now see how I will manage him. I dare say he has but few persons with him, and he will be easily disposed of."

We kept our eye on him and his attendant, and watched him take possession of a shed of wretched appearance, with many symptoms of dissatisfaction. We loitered purposely, till we saw that he was alone and then went up to him.

"*Ram*! *Ram*! *Sethjee*," said Bhudrinath, addressing him; "what a place is this they have put you into after all, not fit for hogs to lie in! That rascally *kotwal*, for all his smooth tongue, is an arrant knave I warrant; and I have heard," continued he,

lowering his voice, "that he has in his employ a number of thieves, whose business it is to cut away travellers' saddle-bags from under their heads at night, and when the poor man goes to complain in the morning he is beaten out of the village. Did we not hear so, *Jemadar Sahib*?"

"Yes, indeed," said I; "don't you remember the man who met us at the village some *coss* from this, and warned us of the thieves of Oomerkher, and said he had been robbed of everything he possessed, and then driven out with scarcely a rag to cover him? It was then that I determined to encamp outside, where we might have our own sentinels, and where, if we were robbed, it would be our own fault."

"God help me! I am a lost man!" cried the merchant; "I know not what to do;" and he beat his head with his clenched hand. In those bags is all I am worth in the world; I fled from Surat to save myself from oppression, and it appears that the farther I fly the worse usage I meet. It was only two nights ago,—after watching till my eyes nearly started from my head from want of sleep, and not being able to sit longer, I lay down and my eyes closed,—that an attempt was made to cut my bags from under me; and as I woke, the thieves snatched away two of my cooking utensils and the cloth I had about me."

"Well," said Bhudrinath in a compassionate tone, "you have been used very ill, and you ought to go and complain to the *hakim* here; report says he is a just man, although those under him may be thieves and rascals."

"No, no, no!" cried the man; "go and complain! and be fleeced of my last rupee! The great man would require a *nuzzur*, and every dependant would ask for one; did I dare to refuse, my situation would be worse than it is now. No, no! I have not been robbed as yet, and please God, if I could only get out of this town, I would attach myself to some party of respectable persons going the same road."

Bhudrinath turned to me, and took me a few paces aside. "The bait has taken," said he; "our net is now round him; you must draw it tightly."

"How?"

"By inviting him to our encampment: I will propose it, and you shall pretend to disagree at first, and then, after some persuasion consent. Do you understand?"

"I do;" and we turned back.

Bhudrinath again addressed him, while I turned away. "*Sethjee*," said he, "you are a man in misfortune, and if we don't help you out of this place you will assuredly be robbed of everything you possess. You must come and put up in our encampment; that is to say, if the *Jemadar Sahib* will permit it; but the truth is, we are very careful, and allow no one to approach it, as we are escorting a merchant from Benares to Hyderabad, who has a large amount of goods with him."

"For the sake of your father and mother!" cried the poor wretch, "for the sake of your children, intercede for me! do not suffer me to be robbed and murdered here! *Ai*! *Jemadar Sahib*," he said to me, catching me by my dress, "you are my father and my mother; a word from you, and I am safe, and my poor merchandise will reach its destination. God knows, if anything happens to me on the road, my house will be made desolate, my employers will seize my wife and children. *Jemadar*, you can protect me from this, you can save my life from these fears, which make me most wretched, and are consuming my soul!"

"Good man," cried I, "do not be so abject. I am able to afford protection to one who is a prince among merchants, and you are too poor to think of. In his name follow us, and we will take care of you; we are going to Hyderabad ourselves, and you can remain among the servants; do you, Peer Khan, bring this man out to us."

Peer Khan remained, and we returned to our camp. On the way we determined that he should die before evening, or when it should become dusk,

and we would then go into the town and visit the evening *durbar* of the *hakim*.

In a short time we beheld the merchant and Peer Khan, with another man, driving two ponies apparently heavily laden towards our camp.

"Come, this is more than I hoped for," said my father, "there are two of them; and two ponies well laden must afford something worth taking; we cannot expect this to be as profitable work as the last, but much may come out of it."

The men approached, and the merchant was presented to my father.

"To your kindness," he said to me, "I owe all I possess, and if these poor bags might but be allowed to remain along with the rest of the merchandise you are protecting, it would increase the favour and they would be safe."

"Surely," I replied, "you can unload your beasts; and there is the pile of goods, you can put your bags on the top of it."

It was curious to see the behaviour of the men of the band; they appeared to have an instinctive knowledge of the purpose for which the men had been brought into the encampment. They did not evince the smallest savageness of demeanour, as perhaps might have been expected; on the contrary, every one was most civil and attentive to the strangers; one offered to rub down the ponies, another to make a place for cooking, a third to bring grass from the town, or anything they might require for their meal. In a short time we observed the appearance of care and anxiety on the face of the merchant to give place to a cheerful expression, and long before evening both the men were among a knot of the Thugs, listening to their stories, and themselves relating their adventures. Little did they think what preparations were making and that in a few short hours they would cease to be counted with the living.

3.—*Wounds and Death.*

Meanwhile a consultation was held as usual at

my father's tent, and the different parts were assigned to us. The office of *bhuttote* fell to me, and the merchant was delivered to my hands. I now experienced none of the hesitation which had formerly troubled my mind; I only longed for objects to exercise myself on, to perfect my hand in the peculiar knack it required.

We agreed to put the men to death immediately after evening prayer.

We had in our camp a boy about twelve years old, the son of one of the Thugs, who sang very beautifully, and his father used to accompany him on the *saringee*. It was our custom of an evening after prayers to send for the youth and be entertained by his songs; and he sang so well, that he often collected a considerable sum from among us. On this occasion he was called, and when he had begun, a message was sent to the merchant to come and partake of our entertainment. He came, and his servant also; the latter was a fine stout man, whiskered and mustachioed, and from the dialect he spoke I concluded him to be a *rajpoot* of Meywar, whose inhabitants are a noble race and brave to a degree. I eyed him, as he sat down in his place, with a half-formed determination to change the merchant for him. Bhudrinath had been allotted to him; and as I reflected on my own powers and his, I felt assured that if he was thought equal to it, I was superior to him, though I might not be considered so. Another thought, and my determination was made; I proposed the exchange to Bhudrinath.

"As you please," said he in a whisper, "but yonder is a tough fellow; these Meywaree *rajpoots* are active as panthers, and to tell you the truth I did not half like the idea of being allotted to him; but there is no help for it, and if I were to fail there are twenty others who would finish him. But do you think yourself equal to him?"

"Yes, I do not fear him; I have, besides, a reputation to win, and do not care running a little risk."

"As you will," he replied; "but you must mention it to your father."

I did so. The merchant was too much absorbed in the boy's song to attend to us, and the servant was in ecstasies, as it was one of his own country.

"Are you able to do it? do not try else," said my father; "the man is armed, and has a dagger at his girdle; a sword I do not fear, but daggers are awkward things, and you might be wounded."

"And suppose I was," I replied, "do you think the fear of that deters me? No, no; I have taken this on myself, and I will, with your permission, go through with it."

"As you like, my son, I will not oppose you; you have a name to gain, and you do well to run some risk. I will observe you narrowly, and be ready to succour you should you require it."

The usual phrase, "*Pân lao*" (bring *pân*), was to be the signal; and as we changed places, myself and Bhudrinath, I fancied the servant eyed us with some suspicion; I thought I saw him loosen the dagger in his girdle; perhaps it was fancy, and yet he must have thought there was danger. He stood up and looked round at us; and as I contemplated his brawny form, naked from the waist, his chest covered with hair, and his muscular arms, I thought for an instant I had overrated my strength; but to recede would have been cowardly. The only plan was to attack him standing; I moved towards him, and cast a keen look on my father, by which I intended that he should give the signal as soon as I had taken my post; he understood me. I had gained my place, the man had just turned round to look at me and to get out of my way, and I was just telling him not to move, as I was passing on, when the signal was given.

Was it that I was a moment late, or that he had caught a glimpse of the fate of his master? or that in reality he suspected that all was not right, that he was in danger? I know not; but as I threw the cloth around his neck, he drew his dagger: to have loosed my hold would have been followed by instant death, he would have plunged it into me; and he stıuggled so much that, in spite of my great

strength, he almost succeeded in getting his other hand between his neck and the cloth. All this happened in less time than I take to say it. My danger was imminent, but as fortune would have it a Thug attempted to seize the hand which held the dagger; this diverted his attention from me for an instant; although half choked, he made an immense effort, which nearly shook me off, and as he reached the unfortunate man, he plunged the weapon into his heart!

This action had given me a fresh hold; I was able to use my knuckles, and who could live under the strength I put forth? The *rajpoot's* dying struggles were tremendous, but I would not quit my hold.

At last there was one convulsion stronger than the previous ones, and he lay still—he was also dead—my second victim!

I arose, breathless and exhausted; and as I looked on the prostrate corpse before me, I felt indeed that there had been danger—that I had escaped from a deadly struggle, and that my art had triumphed over strength. Almost beside the body lay that of the man who had aided me, who had received a desperate wound.

The bodies of the merchant and the *rajpoot* were instantly stripped, and removed to the grave which had long before been prepared for them; it was made inside a small tent, where my father, myself, and some others slept, and where it was secure from observation. I was perfectly astonished,—there was no sign of the earth having been disturbed; the place where the hole had been dug had been carefully beaten down, plastered over with mud; and, but that it was wet, no one could have told that it had been touched by the hand of man. My father's sleeping-carpet and mine were then laid over the place.

"Now," said I to Bhudrinath, "let us put on our best clothes and visit the *hakim*. Will you come too, my father?"

"No, *beta* (no, my son), I have enough to do to keep all quiet here: some one must remain; and

you and Bhudrinath have deserved your amusement, so go and take it. And here," cried he to some of the Thugs, " take your shields and swords, and accompany my son; and see that you look like soldiers, and not like Thugs, for the night."

Six or eight were soon ready, dressed in clean clothes and armed; and by this time, the moon having risen, and it being the hour appointed by the *kotwal* for the evening *durbar*, we set off to the town.

4.—*A Night's Entertainment.*

Truly, dressed as we were in the handsomest clothes we could select, we looked not only soldiers but handsome fellows. Each of us had given a knowing cock to his turban; and mine, of the richest gold tissue, passing several times under my chin, set off my face by giving me a particularly martial appearance. My arms were of the richest description: a sword with a hilt inlaid with gold, its scabbard covered with crimson velvet, with a ferrule to it of silver, of an open pattern, which covered nearly half of it. In my girdle, which was a Cashmere shawl, were a knife, with an agate handle, inlaid also with gold, and a small Arab dagger, also highly ornamented with gold and silver. I carried too a shield of rhinoceros' hide, the manufacture of Sylhet, and painted and gilt in the beautiful manner of Hindostan, the bosses being of silver, richly chased and ornamented. My dress was of the finest muslin, which showed my shape through it to the greatest advantage; and rich cloth-of-gold trousers completed a dress at once elegant, and calculated not only to impress an observer with my correct taste but to convince him that I was a person, if not of rank, of respectability.

Bhudrinath and Peer Khan's appearance was something less showy than mine; but they looked good and true men, and fair seconds to one of my pretensions.

So we set off to the town, and passing the gate went to the *kotwal's chowree*, where we hoped to

meet with him, or with some one who would direct us to the *durbar*. As it happened the *kotwal* was there; and, relinquishing his employment of caring for travellers, he accompanied us to introduce us.

We walked through some of the streets, and at last reached a respectable-looking gateway, around whi h a number of soldiers were standing and lounging. Our friend the *kotwal* passed us through them; and after traversing two open courts, we reached the place where the entertainment and assembly was going on. A fine-looking old man questioned us as to who we were, to which the *kotwal* replied for us, that we were respectable persons desirous of paying our respects to the *Nuwab Sahib;* to which I added, that, having heard much of his great name and hospitality, we considered that it would be unpolite to pass through his town without paying our compliments to him, and becoming acquainted with so estimable a person.

"You are welcome," said the old man; "there is nothing pleases the *Nuwab Sahib* so much as to see strangers, wherever they may come from; and you will have no cause to regret having taken this trouble."

"On the contrary," I replied, "we cannot think it trouble, but an honour seldom allowed to such poor persons as we are. But pray lead us to the presence."

We ascended a few steps into the hall, where sat the *Nuwab*, surrounded by a number of persons. Before him were a group of dancing women, entrancing their hearers with songs of Persia and of Hindostan. Our conductor bade us wait for a moment; and going up to the *Nuwab*, said a few words to him, intimating our arrival.

"*Khamoosh!*" (silence!) cried the *Nuwab*, and it was repeated by a dozen voices; "let the strangers be admitted."

We were ushered in, leaving our shoes at the edge of the pure white cloth which was spread over the part of the room which led to the *Nuwab's musnud*. On seeing us he made a polite salutation; and I

stepped forward, and enveloping the hilt of my sword in an embroidered scarf I had thrown loosely about my shoulders, I presented it as a *nuzzur*.

"*Kubool hooa*," said the old gentleman, placing his hands upon it, "it is accepted; sit down near us. We are much pleased with your appearance, and bid you heartily welcome to this our poor *durbar*. Thou art a brave-looking young fellow. Now tell me who thou art, and who these respectable persons are that accompany you."

"I beg to represent in your service," I replied, joining my hands, "that I am nothing but a poor soldier, a *syed* by birth. I have a few men with me, for whom and myself I am going to Hyderabad to seek service. I am come from Hindustan; my father, who is at our camp, is a merchant going to the city with merchandise. These persons," I continued, pointing to Bhudrinath and Peer Khan, "are two of my associates; and being superior to the rest, I have ventured to bring them to present their *nuzzurs* to the presence."

"By all means, Meer Sahib; we delight to see good and stout-looking fellows. Any one such is a pearl in the eye of an old soldier like myself. Let them be brought forward," said he to an attendant; and both advancing made the requisite salutations, and presented the hilts of their swords as I had done.

The ceremonies of introduction being concluded, the musicians and dancing women were desired to recommence, and I had a moment's leisure to survey the apartment and the scene before me.

The apartment opened through three large wooden arches, into the courtyard which we had crossed; and between them were hung large *purdahs* or curtains of English scarlet cloth, which could be let down as occasion required. The room was lofty, and behind where we sat the walls were ornamented with stucco-work in rich designs. Above, on one side, was a small gallery thickly screened, from whence the inmates of the *zenana* could observe all that was passing below without

being seen. Before us the dancing-girls were moving with their peculiar floating motion, and singing while they expressed the amorous words of their song by their gestures. Another set were sitting down by their side, waiting for their turn to be called, and both were splendidly dressed and covered with jewels.

Nuwab Hoosein Yar Jung Bahadur, a fine-looking wiry old soldier, polite and courtly in his manner, was a good specimen of the noblemen of the Dukhun; though perhaps not so effeminately polished as those of Delhi, yet he was one whose appearance commanded respect; and his bright keen eye, and the seam of a wound on his right cheek, showed that he had seen battle-fields and was familiar with war. His dress was of plain Dacca muslin; but a string of large pearls round his neck, which he used as a rosary, and the beautiful sword lying before him on the carpet would prove to the most casual observer that he was a man of rank and consequence.

He observed me looking round, and addressed me thus:—

"We are in a poor place here, my friend; but what can be done? The duty of the Government must be performed, and we cannot carry our house about with us. However, we have made the place as decent as it could be, considering we are in the jungle; and we have brought bright eyes and sweet voices with us, so that we do not lack amusement. Now tell me the news from Hindustan. Report speaks of war in that quarter, and that the Mahrattas and Pindarees are arming."

"Why," I replied, "there are such reports. We heard that there was service to be got either with Sindea or Holkar, and that they and the *Feringhees* would soon be at war; but we preferred trying our fortune in the Dukhun—for we heard the pay offered by both was very small to soldiers armed as we are, as they place their principal dependence on the troops under the Francese generals, by whom alone the *Ungrez Feringhees* are to be opposed."

"Ay," said the old *nuwab*, "the times of fair fighting are passing away, and the inventions of Europeans are fast supplanting the bravery of the men of Hind. God knows where it will end! Even at Hyderabad the *Feringhees* have got such a hold of the place, that God knows whether they will ever be driven out. And they train the miserable *kafirs* of Tellingana to fight in ranks and perform evolutions which are truly wonderful."

"One comfort, however," said I, "is that the *Francese* and *Ungrez* are at bitter enmity; and if there is a fight, one or other, by the blessing of God, must be beaten. Then will be the time for true believers to rouse themselves, and free their country from the yoke of both."

"You talk like a young, hot-blooded boy: this cannot be. We of Hyderabad are too much beholden to the *Ungrez Feringhees* for freeing us from the demands of the Mahrattas and the oppression of Hyder Ali and Tippoo to quarrel with them; and after all I question whether we could do much against them. Tippoo fell, and he had the advice of the *Francese* in building his fort. God protect me! it was only a mud wall before the *Ungrez*."

"You saw it then?" I inquired.

"Yes, indeed," said he kindling, "I saw the whole; and if you had also, you would have wondered to see the '*soger*' battalions scrambling up the breach like cats, headed by their officers, in the face of a fire of guns and matchlocks which would have scattered the people we call *sipahees* like chaff. Truly they are something like men; and if we of India had fought like them, would they have possessed one foot of ground? They would not; but it is no use regretting. And now Sikundur Jah has made a treaty with the *Ungrez*, and sits in his zenana leaving them to take care of him and his country."

"Then you think," said I, "that I have no chance of service at the city?"

"By no means," said he; "you are, I think, pretty sure of it. There are plenty of openings for

a fine young fellow like you, and your appearance will take with some of those who command troops. You might have had it here, but my list is full; and you are not likely to separate from your men?"

The night was far advanced; and requesting leave to depart, I rose to be gone.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE ROAD TO HYDERABAD.

1.—*A little Bargain with the Nawab.*

Soon after the morning prayer, the leaders of the band were assembled to see the opening of the bags of him who had died the evening before. My father presided in the assembly, and one by one they were brought from the pile of merchandise. We had indeed got a prize; and it was not to be wondered at that the care of them had cost the man they belonged to so much anxiety. In each of them, among a quantity of old clothes, rags, and old copper vessels, were concealed small boxes filled with precious stones, pearls, small diamonds, rubies and emeralds, and in two of the boxes were sets of ornaments made up, and set with jewels; and two in particular, a *bazubund* or ornament for the arm, and a *sir-pesh*, or ornament for the turban, were particularly splendid.

My father, who had a good deal of experience in these matters, pronounced the whole to be worth at least fifteen thousand rupees, and offered the band the alternative of distributing the whole in as equal portions as he could, or of waiting till our arrival at Hyderabad, where they could easily be sold for ready money. The latter, after some deliberation, was determined on, as had been the case with the former booty.

I proposed, as I knew that we might perhaps run short of money on the road, especially if we met with no more rich travellers, to offer one of the two ornaments for sale to the *nuwab* and as I had made his acquaintance to take it to him myself; so

accordingly about noon I called Bhudrinath to accompany me, and we proceeded to the palace, as it was called by the villagers.

By the way we met with our friend the *kotwal;* but I cut him short with " Another time, *kotwal-jee*,"—for it seemed as though we were to have a long story,—" another time, my friend, we will pay you a visit; but at present the matter we have in hand is urgent, and it being past noon we are afraid of being denied admittance, and so you must excuse us."

" Of course," said he, " I will not detain you, and I shall not fail to present myself at your camp this evening to receive your further commands."

" That means," said Bhudrinath as we moved on, " that he expects a present. These worthies have been my study for many years."

" Ay," said I, " we must pay him well, and he will be the first to cry up our praises should anything happen; but do you anticipate anything?"

" Not I," said he. " I wish we could always do our work as securely, and get as well paid for it; but here we are at the *nuwab's* gate."

An attendant at our request took in our names to the *nuwab*, and after a short delay we were again ushered into his presence, and received with the same civility as we had been the night before. After some desultory conversation, I opened the object of our visit.

" *Khodawund*," said I, " my father pleads an attack of fever and cold for not attending to present his *nuzzur* at your feet, and he trusts you will pardon his seeming neglect. In his behalf I have brought a rare piece of jewellery for your inspection, which he hopes may please you; and by its purchase you will not only materially assist him, but it will become the property of one worthy to possess and wear it."

Thus saying, I produced the ornament for the turban, and laid it before him. He was evidently much struck with its beauty and the fine water of the precious stones, and after turning it in every

position he could, to catch the exact light for it, laid it down with a kind of sigh.

"It is indeed beautiful; but," said he, "I am too poor to buy it; its value must be very great."

"No doubt," said I, "my grandfather must have paid handsomely for it; but times have altered with us, and we have been glad to sell our family property for whatever it would fetch. In this instance, far be it from your slave's intention to put a price upon an ornament without peer in its fashion; yet methinks it would so well become the forehead of my lord that he ought not to let slip such an opportunity of possessing it, to be enabled to show it one day at the court of his prince."

The *nuwab* took the jewel, and went into his *zenana*. He was absent a long time, but we could see by his face on his return that it had been approved of.

"They have looked at it in a thousand ways, and have discovered that there is good fortune to come with it; not that I need any, but you know what a parcel of old women are," said he. "And now I will ask what may be the price. You know we nobles of Hyderabad are not overburdened with money, and you must be moderate in your demand."

"Why," said I, "I am flattered by the opinion of those who have seen it, and can only say that my grandfather (may his memory live for ever!) paid so large a sum for the jewel that I am afraid to mention it. My lord must observe particularly its exquisite water. He, I say, collected the stones one by one during a long period of his life, and they cost him alone six thousand rupees; the gold around them is somewhat more; but my father will esteem himself fortunate if five thousand rupees be given for it."

"It is too much," said the *nuwab* with a sigh; "where have I five thousand rupees to lay out in such a bauble as this? My friends, I have been gratified by the sight of it, but to purchase it is out of the question: the money I have not. Yet stay;

allow me to have it valued by a jeweller, and we may perhaps come to terms."

"By all means," said I; "I have told my lord no lie in stating the price of it. But let the jeweller see it; he may fix a smaller sum; and such is our urgent necessity for a little ready money that perhaps we may be induced to take something less."

The jeweller was accordingly sent for, and arrived after a short time. He was shown the jewel; and from the expression of admiration on his countenance, I could see we had not overvalued it. He took it to the light, and putting on his spectacles, examined it in every possible way. At last he returned, and taking the spectacles from his nose, asked the price we had fixed on it. I told him.

"At the time this was made up," said he, "no doubt it was worth the sum you mention, for the stones are of rare water; nevertheless, we all know that men cannot afford to expend money as they used to do, and all things considered, perhaps at present four thousand rupees would not be too much, and indeed a fair price."

"It is too little; we must be content to sell other articles to supply our necessities. So *nuwab sahib*," said I, "with our profound thanks for your condescension, we ask leave for our departure;" and I took up the jewel and arose.

"Stay," said he; "I offer you three hundred rupees more: four thousand three hundred, surely that is sufficient."

"Make it five hundred," I replied, "and it is yours." And after much haggling on both sides, the price was fixed at four thousand four hundred and fifty. Of this, two thousand five hundred were paid by the *nuwab's* treasurer in money, and for the rest at my request, a bill was made out by a *sahoukar* of the village on Hyderabad. And after again offering our thanks to the *nuwab*, we took leave of him for ever.

"Not a bad morning's work" said I to my companion as we walked homewards, attended by some of the *nuwab's* soldiers, escorting the men who

carried the bags of money; "the sight of the coin will gladden my old father's heart; and it will be something to divide among the men, who are really in want of money, and will keep them comfortably till we reach the city, even though we should fall in with no more rich prizes."

2.—Hyderabad.

We passed the village of Ulwal, its white *pagoda* peeping from among groves of tamarind and mango trees, and its large tank now glistening in the rays of the sun; and pursuing our way, we saw on passing a ridge of rocks, the camp of the army at the far-famed Hoosain Sagor, or as it is more often called, Secunderabad. The tents of the English force glittered in the bright sun, and behind them lay a vast sheet of blue water.

We had heard much of this lake from many persons on our journey, and as we passed it a strong breeze had arisen, and the surface was curled into thousands of waves, whose white crests, as they broke, sparkled like diamonds, and threw their spray into our faces as they dashed against the stonework of the embankment. We stood a long time gazing upon the beautiful prospect, so new to us all, and wondering whether the sea, of which we had heard so much, could be anything like what was before us. I have since then, *sahib*, twice seen the sea. I need not attempt to describe it, for you have sailed over it; but when I saw it first, methought I could have fallen down and worshipped it, it appeared so illimitable, its edge touching as it were the heavens, and spread out into an expanse which the utmost stretch of my imagination could not compass,—a fit type, I thought, of the God of all people, whom every one thinks on; while the hoarse roar of the waves as they rolled on, mountain after mountain, and broke in angry fury against the shore, seemed to be a voice of Omnipotence which could not fail to awaken emotions of awe and dread in the most callous and unobservant!

We passed the embankment of the tank. As yet we had seen nothing of the city; but there was a ridge not far off, and as we ascended I could no longer control my impatience. I spurred my horse, and before I reached the top shut my eyes, that whatever was before me might burst upon my view at once.

My horse slackened his pace when he reached the top, and allowing him to go on a few steps I opened my eyes, and glorious indeed was the prospect before me.

Beneath lay Hyderabad, the object of many a conjecture, of many an ardent desire to reach it—the first city of the Dukhun, justly celebrated throughout the countries I had passed. I had imagined it, like every other I had seen, to be in the midst of a plain, and that all that would be visible of it would be here and there a minaret rising out of large groves of trees; but Hyderabad presented a different aspect.

I stood on the crest of a gentle slope, which to my right hand was broken at some distance by rocky hills, and to the left appeared gradually to descend into a plain, which stretched away almost uninterruptedly to the horizon. Before me, on the gentle rise of the valley, and beyond where I supposed a river to be, lay the city, its white terraced houses gleaming brightly in the sunlight from amidst what seemed to me at the distance, almost a forest of trees. The Char Minar and Mecca Musjid rose proudly from the masses of buildings by which they were surrounded; and here and there a white dome, with its bright gilt spire, marked the tomb of some favourite or holy saint, while smaller mosques, I might say in hundreds, were known by their slender white minarets.

Beyond the city rose another connected chain of rocky hills which ran along until they met those on the right hand, and shut in the valley on that side. The city seemed to be of immense extent; but I thought from the number of trees, that it was composed principally of gardens and enclosures, and

was much surprised afterwards, when I entered it, to find its streets so filled with houses, and the whole so thickly peopled.

It was altogether a most lovely scene: the freshness of the morning, the pureness of the air, and the glittering effect of the city and its buildings caused an impression which can never be effaced from my memory. Inquiring the nearest road to the *karwan*, we descended the slope, and threading our way through numberless suburbs we were at the end of our journey. We were grateful for it, and for the protection and success we had met with. We took up our abode for the present in a *serai* which surrounded a large and richly ornamented mosque; and for our greater convenience I went in search of an untenanted house, and after some difficulty succeeded in hiring a small place, the property of a merchant who resided next door. It contained only three rooms and the verandah, which was the shop; but it was enough for my father and myself, and there was a small room with a strong door, in which we stowed away all our plunder.

Our landlord the merchant was very civil and attentive to our wants, though his civility evidently proceeded in a great measure from curiosity as to who we were and what was our object. I stated to him in a few words our old story—of my father being a merchant, and myself a soldier of fortune who had accompanied him in search of employment. He was now curious to know of what my father's stock in trade consisted; but we were resolutely silent upon the subject, although he offered his agency to dispose of our goods.

"For," said my father to me afterwards, "our goods I know are valuable, and I know not their worth; nor have we as yet opened the bales; we will do so to-morrow morning, and assort them; we will then go into the city to the shops of the *sahoukars*, and inquire for articles similar to them, find out their prices, and by this means be enabled to value our own. Were we to offer them in

ignorance of their market prices, we might be suspected; and though we may not get what they are intrinsically worth, we shall no doubt be able to sell the whole for a handsome sum."

I agreed with him perfectly, and the next morning we set to work to open the bales.

Their contents were indeed costly,—brocades, cloth of gold, fine muslin scarves, also woven with gold and silver patterns, plain muslins, and a few shawls, besides fine cloths of different kinds for wearing apparel, and *sarees* with silk and tissue borders, the latter from the looms of Nagpoor. These, and the jewels in our possession, when laid out and assorted, made a display on which we feasted our eyes for some time, wondering at their magnificence: after I had made an inventory of the whole, my father and myself, attired in handsome clothes and mounted on the best of our horses, attended by a few of the men, took our way into the city.

"It is the hour of prayer," said my father, "and hark! the *muezzin* calls from the *Mecca* mosque; thither we will now proceed, and afterwards transact our business."

I followed him, and passing by the Char Minar, we turned up a street to our right, and stopped our horses at the gate of the mosque.

A feeling of awe mingled with admiration came over me as we entered the court-yard and advanced along a raised causeway to the foot of a flight of steps which led up to the interior. On either side of us were the graves of princes and nobles, many of them of elegant forms and richly carved; but the building itself engrossed my entire admiration. Five lofty and wide arches opened to view the interior of the edifice where an equal number appeared in depth; and where the arches met, the eye was perplexed by the innumerable points and ornaments, which, running into each other, completed a roof of exquisite design and workmanship. To add to its beauty, the whole was of stone, carefully

smoothed, whereas the Char Minar and the other buildings I had as yet seen were stucco.

But I had little time to observe more; the sonorous and melancholy call of the *muezzin* had ended, and the few attendants for the afternoon prayer had spread their carpets and commenced their devotions. We joined them, and kneeling on our outspread waist-bands, went through the usual forms, while the low murmur of the prayers of all ascended to the fretted roof and added to the solemnity of the scene.

The ceremony concluded, we rose, and though I was well disposed to linger in the sacred edifice and observe more of its beauties, my father hurried me away, and we returned to the Char Minar.

3.—*Business is begun.*

"Here," said my father; "those useful rogues the *dullals* are to be met with. They will try to cheat us, no doubt, as it is their trade; but as we are not purchasers, we may avail ourselves of their aid to find out the houses of the merchants who deal in our articles, and it may be that the fellow we fix on will be intelligent and assist us to dispose of our property."

We stopped on reaching the building, the lower part of which was sadly disfigured by numbers of wretched huts and stalls, where vendors of vegetables and sweetmeats sat, and served out their goods to the passers-by. My father, calling to a decent-looking young Hindoo, of intelligent countenance, asked him where he could meet with a *dullal*, as he was a stranger in the city, and wished to see some clothes and other goods, which he did not know where to find.

"I am one at your service, noble sir," he replied; "and I know well the richest warehouses, and can lead you to any you wish; and," added he, "there is not a *sahoukar* or dealer in the city who will not readily give your poor servant, Mohun Das, a character for sobriety and trustworthiness."

"You had better not say much of your good qualities till they have been proved," said my father; "your tribe has not the best reputation on these points."

"What description of goods may you be in search of?" said he; "any may be procured, from the shawls of Cashmere and brocades of Benares to the meanest article."

"Benares fabrics are what we require," said I; "a few handsome *roomals* and *doputtas*, and a turban or two, to adorn ourselves for the minister's durbar."

"You shall see them," said the *dullal*, girding his shawl about his waist. "Now follow me, and keep a good eye on me, lest you lose me in the crowd." And so saying, he descended the steps of the building, and led us along some of the principal streets, till he dived into an obscure alley and stopped at the door of a house which certainly promised nothing from its exterior.

We were ushered into the interior of the house, and were received by a large fat man, the very counter-part of the sahoukar I had killed. I started involuntarily at the resemblance; but soon recovering myself, and assured by his civility, I seated myself, as did also my father, and we quickly entered on the object of our visit.

One by one bales were opened and their contents spread before us. The sahoukar's stock seemed to be interminable and of great value. We selected several articles, and inquiring the prices of those which we inspected, of which I made memoranda, we desired them to be kept for us, saying that we would call the next day with money to pay for them. The sahoukar pressed us to take them with us, and the *dullal* offered his security for us; but for obvious reasons we declined, and took our leave of the merchant.

The *dullal* accompanied us as far as the Char Minar, where my father, slipping a piece of money into his hands for his trouble, told him we now knew our way home, and bade him come early in

the morning to the *karwan* and inquire for the house of Rugonath Das Sahoukar, where he would get tidings of us.

"So far I am satisfied," said my father; "our goods, as you will have observed, are equal in quality to those we saw, and by the prices affixed to them we have a good earnest of a large sum of money, if we can only dispose of them, a matter I apprehend of no difficulty if properly managed."

The next morning came the *dullal*.

"Canst thou be secret?" asked my father at once, and throwing him a couple of rupees. The fellow started and trembled.

"I can be secret," cried the *dullal;* "let my lord speak."

"It will fare badly with thee if thou art not," said my father, again looking grimly at him; "but listen. I am a merchant; I have never been in this city before; but hearing at Delhi that an investment of valuable goods, such as we saw yesterday, was likely to sell well here, I have brought one down with me. I knew not the selling prices here, and therefore engaged thee to show me some goods, that I might be able to regulate the sale of my own. Now canst thou manage it for me?"

"Surely, surely," said the fellow in delight, "nothing is more easy. My lord will not, of course, forget my perquisites on the sale?"

"Thou shall have five rupees in every hundred's worth disposed of," said my father; "will this content thee?"

"It is a princely offer and worthy of my lord's generosity," said the *dullal*. "Might I be permitted to see the goods?"

"It is necessary that you should see them, and here they are," rejoined my father; "and he opened the door of the room where they were, and one by one displayed the contents of the bales."

"This is indeed a rich stock," said the *dullal;* "you may be able to sell most of the cloths, but I question whether the whole, without you intend to remain here some time."

"That depends upon circumstances over which I have no control," said my father; "if I cannot sell them all here, I shall take what remains to Poonah."

"Well," said the man, "if I am permitted, I will make memoranda of all that there is here, and in the course of to-morrow will let you know what can be done. I cannot do so earlier, for I shall have to visit all the dealers."

"Do what you think best," said my father, "and here are ten rupees for your expenses. Now begone and let me see you again at this time to-morrow."

CHAPTER VI.

SET A THIEF TO CATCH A THIEF.

1—*The Festival.*

The city was in festival. As we looked out, the sight was indeed magnificent. A crowd of some hundreds of people were escorting a *punjah*, that holy symbol of our faith, most of them were armed, and their naked weapons gleamed brightly in the light of numberless torches which were elevated on lofty bamboos.

One by one the processions ranged themselves in front, and as they joined together, who can describe the splendour of the effect of the thousands of torches, the thousands of *aftab-geers*, of flags and pennons of all descriptions, the hundreds of elephants, gaily caparisoned, bearing on their backs their noble owners, clad in the richest apparel, attended by their armed retainers and spearmen, some stationary, others moving to and fro, amidst the vast mass of human beings!

One elephant in particular I remarked,—a noble animal, bearing a large silver umbara, in which sat four boys, doubtless the sons of some nobleman from the number of attendants who surrounded them. The animal was evidently much excited by the noise, the lights, and the crowd; but the *mahout* seemed to have great difficulty in keeping him quiet, and often dug his *ankoos* into the brute's head with great force, which made him lift his trunk into the air and bellow with pain. I saw the *mahout* was enraged, and, from the gestures of some of the persons near, could guess that they were advising him to be gentle; but the animal became more restive, and I feared there would be

some accident, as the *mahout* only punished him the more severely. At last, by some unlucky chance, the blazing part of a torch fell from the pole upon which it was raised on the elephant's back; he screamed out with the sudden pain, and raising his trunk, rushed into the crowd.

What a sight it was! Hundreds as they vainly endeavoured to get out of the way, only wedged themselves closer together, shrieks and screams rent the air; but the most fearful sight was when the maddened beast, unable to make his way, through the press, seized on an unfortunate wretch by the waist with his trunk, and whirling him high in the air dashed him against the ground, and then kneeling down crushed him to a mummy with his tusks. Involuntarily I turned away my head; the sight was sickening, and it was just under me.

When I looked again, the brute, apparently satisfied, was standing quietly, and immediately afterwards was driven away; the body of the unfortunate man was carried off and deposited in a neighbouring shop; and all again became quiet.

All at once the multitude broke out into deafening shouts of "Hassan! Hoosein! Deen! Deen!" the hoarse roar of which was mingled with the beating of immense nagaras. The sound was deafening, yet most impressive; the multitude became agitated; every face was at once turned towards the portal from which the sacred relic was about to issue, and it came forth in another instant amidst the sudden blaze of a thousand blue lights. I turned my eye to the Char Minar. If it had looked brilliant by the torch-light, how much more so did it now! The pale sulphurous glare caused its white surface to glitter like silver; high in the air the white minarets gleamed with intense brightness; and as it stood out against the deep blue of the sky, it seemed to be a sudden creation of the genii—so grand, so unearthly—while the numberless torches, overpowered by the superior brightness of the fire-works, gave a dim and lurid light

through their smoke, which, as there was not a breath of wind, hung over them.

All at once a numberless flight of rockets from the top of the Char Minar sprang hissing into the sky, and at an immense height, far above the tops of the minarets, burst almost simultaneously, and descended in a shower of brilliant blue balls. There was a breathless silence for a moment, as every eye was upturned to watch their descent, for the effect was overpowering. But again the shouts arose, the multitude swayed to and fro like the waves of a troubled sea; every one turned towards the Char Minar, and in a few instants the living mass was in motion.

It moved slowly at first, but the pressure from behind was so great that those in front were obliged to run; gradually, however, the mighty tide flowed along at a more measured pace, and it seemed endless. Host after host poured through the narrow street; men of all countries, most of them bearing naked weapons which flashed in the torch-light, were ranged in ranks, shouting the cries of the faith; others in the garbs of fakeers chanted hymns of the death of the blessed martyrs; others again in fantastic dresses formed themselves into groups, and, as they ran rather than walked along, performed strange and uncouth antics; some were painted from head to foot with different colours; others had hung bells to their ankles, shoulders, and elbows, which jangled as they walked or danced; here and there would be seen a man painted like a tiger, a rope passed round his waist, which was held by three or four others, while the tiger made desperate leaps and charges into the crowd, which were received with shouts of merriment.

Some again were dressed in sheepskins, to imitate bears; others were monkeys, with enormous tails; and they grinned and mowed at the crowd which surrounded them. Now, some nobleman would scatter from his elephant showers of pice or couries among the crowd below him; and it was fearful, though amusing, to watch the eager scramble and

the desperate exertions of those undermost, to extricate themselves,—not unattended by severe bruises and hurts. Bodies of Arabs, singing their wild war-songs, firing their matchlocks in the air, and flourishing their naked swords, joined the throng, and immediately preceded the holy relic, which at last came up.

It was carried on a cushion of cloth of gold covered by a small canopy of silver tissue; the canopy and its deep silver fringes glittering in the blaze of innumerable torches. Mollas dressed in long robes walked slowly before, singing the Moonakib and the Murceas. Men waved enormous chourees of the feathers of peacocks' tails, incense burned on the platform of the canopy and sent up its fragrant cloud of smoke, and handfuls of the sweet ubeer were showered upon the cushion by all who could by any means or exertions get near enough to reach it.

Gradually and slowly the whole passed by. Who can describe its magnificence? Such a scene must be seen to be felt! I say *felt*, for who could see a mighty multitude like that, collected for a holy purpose with one heart, one soul, without emotion? Hours we sat there gazing on the spectacle; we scarcely spoke, so absorbed were we by the interest of the scene below us. At length, however, the whole had passed, and the street was left to loneliness and darkness.

2.—*Business.*

On the following morning I found Mohun Das, the *dullal*, closeted with my father, and also another sahoukar-looking person. Mohun Das had been eminently successful. The sahoukar I saw was the assistant in a wealthy house, which had need of all our goods, and he had come to see them before the bargain was finally closed. They were displayed to him, both goods and jewels; he approved of all, said he would return shortly with an offer for them, and having made a list of the whole he departed.

"Now," said Mohun Das, "about the price; what do you ask?"

"You know better than I do," said my father, "therefore do you speak, and remember, the more they sell for the more you get."

"I have not forgotten your munificence," said the *dullal*, "and I say at once the cloths are worth sixteen, and the jewels ten thousand rupees; but you must ask thirty thousand,—you will get twenty-five I daresay."

"It is too little," said my father; "they cost me nearly that sum; and how am I to pay my guards if I get no profit? I shall ask thirty-five for the whole."

"Well," said the *dullal*, "if you do, so much the better for me; but mark what I say, you will get no more than my valuation; however, if you will trust me and leave it to my judgment, I will get a fair price."

"I will, but recollect, twenty-five thousand is the least."

"Certainly," said the *dullal;* "I go to do your bidding."

It was noon before he returned, but it was with a joyful face when he did come.

After many profound *salaams* he exclaimed to my father: "You have indeed been fortunate; your good destiny has gained you a good bargain. I have got thirty thousand six hundred rupees for the whole. We had a long fight about it and wasted much breath; and, here is the sahoukar's acknowledgment."

My father took it and pretended to read; I was near laughing outright at his gravity as he took the paper and pored over the crabbed Hindee characters, of which he did not understand one,—nor indeed any other; for he could neither read nor write.

"Yes," said he gravely, "it is satisfactory; how am I to be paid?"

"The sahoukar will arrange that with you in any way you please," said the *dullal;* "ready money

or bills are equally at your service; but as all transactions are generally at six months' credit, the interest for that time at the usual rate will be deducted."

"And if I take bills, I suppose the interest will be allowed till I reach Benares, or whatever place I may take them upon?"

"Certainly."

"Good," continued my father; "do you attend here with the sahoukar, and we will settle all about it, and he can take away the merchandise whenever he pleases."

So the *dullal* departed.

It was now about the time when the *tazeas* were to be brought to the edge of the river to be thrown into the water, and as the *karwan* was not far from the spot, I proposed to my father to send for our horses and ride thither to see the sight.

He agreed, the horses were quickly brought, and we rode to the bridge over which the road passes into the city. Taking our stand upon it, we beheld beneath us the various and motley groups in the bed of the river; there were thousands assembled; the banks of the river and the bed were full,—so full, it seemed as if you might have walked upon the heads of the multitude. The *aftab-geers*, and the tinsel of the various *tazeas* glittered in the afternoon sun,—the endless variety of colours of the dresses had a cheerful and gay effect,—and though it was nothing to the grand appearance of the procession at night, still it was worth looking at. The *tazeas* were brought one by one, by the various tribes or neighbourhoods to which they belonged, and thrown into the pools in the bed of the river, for deep water there was none; but there was sufficient for the purpose, and as each glittering fabric was cast in, it was assailed by hundreds of little ragged urchins, who quickly tore the whole to pieces for the sake of the ornaments; and there was many a warm contest and scramble over these remains, which excited the laughter of the bystanders.

The *Mohorum* was ended. We stayed on the bridge till the time for evening prayer, when, repairing to an adjacent mosque, we offered up our devotions with the others of the faithful who were there assembled.

I found when I reached home that the *dullal* had arrived, and with him the sahoukar's clerk and some porters to carry the goods, as well as fellows with matchlocks and lighted matches and others with swords and shields to escort them. I stared at them.

"One would think you were going to battle, Séthjee," said I, "with all those fierce fellows; I am half afraid of them."

The fellows laughed; and the clerk replied, "They are necessary, and we always have them. If our goods were stolen, nay carried off before our eyes, should we get any redress? no, indeed. We therefore protect our property the best way we can."

"Now," said my father, "take your goods and be off with them; they are no longer mine, and I fear to allow them to remain under my roof."

"Surely," said the clerk, "they will be out of your way directly; and now let us speak about your money, or will you take some merchandise as part of it?"

"Not a bit, not a bit," replied my father; "I want all my money in rupees—no, stay, not all in rupees; give me five thousand in silver and the rest in gold, it will be easier carried."

"I suppose you mean five thousand rupees, and the rest in gold bars; well, you must purchase gold according to weight, and the best is twenty rupees a tola; but you had better take bills, and the exchange is favourable."

"No, no; no bills," said my father, "but the gold; if I remember rightly, the price of gold was high when I left Delhi, and was likely to remain so; and I have plenty of persons for my guard if robbers should attack me."

"You forget me," cried the *dullal*, "and my percentage."

"Make yourself easy," said I; "it will be paid out of the five thousand rupees; it will be about fifteen hundred I think."

"What did you say? Fifteen hundred. To whom?" asked the clerk.

"To this *dullal*," said I; "I suspect the rascal is cheating us."

"Cheating! surely he is. Why, Mohun Das, good man, what have you been about? Are you mad, to ask so much?"

"Ah, it was my lord's offer and promise," said he, "and surely I shall now get it. Pray what business is it of yours?"

"What ought he to have?" asked my father.

"One per cent. is ample," replied the other "and you might have saved this too if you had only applied yourself to the different sahoukars."

"We were strangers," said I, "and knew not their places of residence; so we were obliged to have recourse to this rascal, who offered his services."

"What! did you not take me from the Char Minar? Did you not promise me five per cent., and bind me to secrecy about the sale of your goods?" cried the *dullal*.

"Listen to him," said my father; "he raves. Now, Meer Sahib, did not this rascal come begging and beseeching for employment, and when I said I would try him, and asked his terms, he said he was miserably poor, and would take whatever was given him; was it not so? And now we are to be bearded in this manner, defrauded of fifteen hundred rupees, where we have not as many *couries* to give, and made to eat dirt into the bargain. Beat him on the mouth with a shoe!"

"Nay, my good friend," said the sahoukar's clerk, "be not thus rash and hot headed, nor waste your breath upon so mean a wretch since you have employed him, something must be given, it is the custom, and next time you will know better; say, may I pay him the one per cent., which will be three hundred and six rupees?"

"Three hundred and six rupees! Where am I to get the half?" cried my father. "Get me off with what you can; I swear by your head and eyes that I am a poor man, and only an agent; is it not so, Meer Sahib? Am I not miserably poor?"

"You certainly cannot afford to pay so much money as one per cent. on this large sum," I replied; "nevertheless, as such appears to be the custom, you had better give something, say one hundred and fifty rupees."

"Certainly," said my father; "I am ready; I will not refuse anything in reason; but so large a sum—I was quite astounded at the impertinence of the demand and lost my temper like a fool."

Mohun Das stood all this time with his eyes and mouth wide open, looking from one to the other, every word that was uttered increasing his astonishment and disappointment.

"Do you pretend to say," screamed he at last, "do you pretend to say that I am not to get my money, my fifteen hundred rupees, for which I have toiled night and day? And do you pretend to say I came to you first? Did you not take me with you from the Char Minar?"

"Nay, here is the Char Minar again"; said I to the clerk, "if you really know this fellow, advise him to be quiet. What have I, who am a soldier, to do with his filthy traffic. He may provoke a patient man once too often, and people with weapons in their hands are not safe persons to play jokes with"; and I twisted up my mustachios.

I have told you, *sahib*, what a coward the fellow was; he fell instantly on the ground and rubbed his forehead against the floor.

"Pardon! pardon!" he cried, "most brave sirs! Anything, whatever you choose to give me, even ten rupees, will be thankfully received, but do not kill me, do not put me to death; see, I fall at your feet, I rub my nose in the dust."

"You fool," cried the clerk, holding his sides with laughter, for he was a fat man; "you fool;

ah, Mohun Das, that I should have seen this! Are you a child—you with those mustachios? Shame on you, man; *dullal* as you are, be something less of a coward; get up, ask for your money boldly, ask for whatever these gentlemen please to give you, though indeed you deserve nothing for your impertinent attempt at deception."

He got up and stood on his left leg, with the sole of the right foot against the calf, his hands joined, his turban all awry, and the expression of his face most ludicrously miserable.

"Ten rupees, my lord," he faltered out; "your slave will take ten rupees."

We all once more burst into a peal of laughter; the gomashta's sides appeared to ache, and the tears ran down his cheeks.

"Nay," said my father, "let him have his due. You said one hundred and fifty—that he shall have. Do you, Meer Sahib, go with this worthy sahoukar to his *kothee*, and bring the money; I dare say he will give you a guard back, and you can hire a porter for the gold and silver."

"Certainly, you shall have the men," said the gomashta; "and now come along; I shall have to collect the gold, and it may be late before it can be weighed and delivered to you, and the rupees passed by a suraff."

As we went on, the *dullal* said to me, "You will pay me at the kothee, will you not?"

"We will see," said I; "the money is none of mine, and I will ask advice on the subject."

"Not your money! Whose then?"

"Why his who has employed you, and from whom you are to get one hundred and fifty rupees," I said. "Are you a fool? why do you ask?"

"Ah nothing, only I was thinking——"

"Thinking of what?" I asked; "some rascality, I doubt not."

"Ah," said he, "now you speak as you did at the Char Minar."

"By Alla!" said I, stopping and looking at him, "if ever you mention that word again——"

"Never, never!" cried the wretch, trembling; "do not beat me; remember it is the open street, and there will be a distuibnace; the words escaped me unawares, just as I was thinking——"

"That is twice you have said that, and by Alla! I think you have some meaning in it. What *would* you be at?"

"Nothing, nothing," said he; "only I was thinking——"

"Well!"

"I was only thinking that you are an adventurer, who has accompanied that rich merchant from Hindostan."

"Well, and what of that? you knew that before."

"You are not rich?"

"No indeed," said I, "I am not."

"Then," said the wretch, "why not both of us enrich ourselves?"

"How?" I asked.

"Refuse the guard, or take some men I will guide you to: they will do whatever you like for five rupees apiece; we will fly with the money, and there is a place in the rocks close to this where I have plunder hidden—we will go thither and share it."

"Where is the place you allude to—is it far?" I asked.

"No," said he; "will you come. I can show it you from a distance; we need not get up the rocks—there is danger of being seen in the day time."

I followed him for a little distance, and he pointed to a huge pile of rocks at the back of the *karwan* and Begum Bazar.

"There, do you see a white spot about halfway up on a rock?"

"I do," said I.

"That is the spot," he replied; "it is known but to myself and a few others; whatever I can pick up I put there."

"What do you get?"

"Ah, little enough; sometimes a shawl, a brocade handkerchief, or some gold, anything in fact. But why do you ask? will you do what I said, and join us? There are sixteen of us; one is yonder, disguised as a fakeer, the rest are hard by and will accompany us."

"Dog!" cried I dashing him to the earth, "dog! dost thou know to whom thou speakest? Here there is no one" (for we had got to the back of the houses), "and it were an easy task to send thee to Jehanum; one blow of my sword, and that false tongue would cease to speak for ever;" and I half drew it. I knew the effect this would have; there was the same grovelling cowardice he had displayed before. He clung to my knees; I spurned him and spat on him. "Reptile!" cried I at length, wearied by his abjectness, "I would scorn to touch thee; a syud of Hindoostan is too proud to stoop to such game as thou art. Lead me to the sahoukar, for, by Alla, I distrust thee!"

"Nay, in this matter I have been honest," said the wretch; "the money is sure."

"It will be well for thee that it is," said I, "or I swear to be revenged. Lead on and beware how you go; if I see one attempt at escape I will cut you in two, were it in the middle of the bazar."

"Then follow me closely," said he; and he gathered up his garments, which had become disordered, and we again entered the crowded bazar. We were soon at the sahoukar's, who awaited us; the money and gold were told out, and a receipt I had brought with me given; and, accompanied by the guard of soldiers, I took the treasure to my father.

"Meer Sahib, kind Meer Sahib," said the *dullal*, as we approached our dwelling, "you will forget all that has passed; I was only jesting with you; I love to play such tricks,—nay, I have always been of a jesting disposition;" and he laughed in his terror. "You will not forget my little perquisite, my hundred and fifty rupees, I know you will not."

"Peace!" cried I, "if you wish to get a *courie*.

Has it not been promised to thee on the word of two of the faithful? Thou shalt get the uttermost farthing."

I dismissed the sepoys with a small present, when the money had been lodged in our strong-room; and as they went, the miserable *dullal* looked after them as though he thought with them had departed his last chance for existence. It certainly drew to a close.

"Give me my money and let me depart," said he in a hollow voice.

"What," said I, "till it is counted out for you."

"Ah, I had forgotten the *dullaljee*," cried my father; "I will get out his due."

3.—*Punishment.*

My father counted out the money and handed it over to the *dullal;* his countenance brightened as he viewed it, and he made numberless *salaams* and protestations of thanks. "Now you must write a receipt for the money," said my father.

"Surely," replied the fellow, taking a pen out of his turban, "if my lord will give me paper and ink."

"Here they are," said I; "write."

He did so, gave me the paper, and tied the money up in a corner of his dhotee, which he tucked into his waist-band. "Have I permission to depart?" he asked; "my lord knows the poor *dullal*, and that he has behaved honestly in this transaction. Whenever my lord returns to Hyderabad, he can always hear of Mohun Das, if he inquires at the Char Minar; and he will always be ready to exert himself in his patron's service."

"Stay," said I, "I have somewhat to say to thee;" and I related to my father the whole of the conversation I have just described.

"Is it so?" said he to the miserable being before him; "is it so? Speak, wretch! let me hear the truth from thine own lips. Wouldest thou have robbed me?"

But the creature he addressed was mute; he stood

paralysed by fear and conscious guilt, his eyes starting from his head, his mouth open, and his blanched lips drawn tightly across his teeth.

"Thou hast deserved it," continued my father; "I read in that vile face of thine deeds of robbery, of murder, of knavery, and villainy of every kind; thou must die!"

"Ah, no, no! Die? My lord is pleased to be facetious; what has his poor slave done?" And he grinned a ghastly smile.

"Thou wouldest have robbed me," said my father, "when I trusted thee with my whole substance; thou wouldest have left me to starve in a strange land without compunction; thou hast robbed others, and cheated thousands; say, art thou fit to live, to prey longer upon the world thou hast already despoiled?"

He threw himself at my father's feet; he grasped his knees; he could scarcely speak, and was fearfully convulsed and agitated by extreme terror. "I am all that you say," he cried, "thief, murderer, and villain! but oh! do not kill me. My lord's face is kind—I cannot die—and my lord has no sword, and how will he kill me?" He had only just perceived that we were both unarmed, and he made a sudden rush at the door. "The kotwal shall know of this," he cried; "people are not to be terrified with impunity." The door was fastened; he gave several desperate pulls and pushes at it; but I was at his back, and the fatal handkerchief was over his head: he turned round and glared on me—the next instant he was dead at my feet.

"There," said my father exultingly, "judgment has overtaken him, and the memory of his crimes will sleep with him for ever; we have done a good deed."

"Yes," said I, "a good one indeed; he confessed himself to be a murderer, robber, and knave—what more need you? and so young too for this accumulation of crime!"

"Drag him in here," said my father, "I like not to look on him; and go for the lughaees; he

must be buried at night in the small yard of the house; I dare not have the body carried out in this crowded city."

"It shall be done," I replied; "but think what an escape we have had. Had you not told me to go with the wretch, we should have lost our money."

"Yes, my son, and even had we got it, had you not suspected that five per cent. was too much, I should certainly have paid the sum; but I saw your drift, and I think took up the clue admirably. We have cheated the knave both out of his money and his life."

"True," said I, "it has been a good adventure, and amusing withal; besides, it promises further advantage."

"From the rock and the fakeer?"

"Yes; there will be good booty."

"Take care," said my father; "the band may be there, and will give you a warm reception."

"I will go and consult with Bhudrinath," said I; "the adventure will just suit him and Surfuraz Khan; we will do nothing rashly."

Bhudrinath was at the serai waiting for me.

"So, Meer Sahib," said he, "you are still in the humour for a frolic; how many lives will satisfy your worship to-night? There is no lack of men in this abode of villainy."

"I am in the humour," said I, "but not for what I intended; I have better game in view."

"Ha!" said he, "so *you* have been acting sotha; and pray what may this game be?"

"One that will require stout hearts, and, may be, naked weapons," I replied; are you willing to accompany me?"

"To death," said Bhudrinath; "but I cannot for my life see what you are driving at."

"Listen," I replied; and I related to him the whole history of the dullal.

"Cleverly done, very cleverly indeed, my young jemadar," said he, when my relation was ended. "No one could have managed it better from first to

last; the rascal deserved his fate; and now I suppose we must search out these hidden treasures in the rock."

"Exactly," said I; "I would do so this very night if I knew how to go about it properly."

"Let me see," said Bhudrinath musing; "we shall not want many men, six or eight resolute fellows will be sufficient. You and I, Peer Khan, Motee-ram, and four others, are ample; there is no use waiting for Surfuraz Khan, he will not now be back before the morning. But how to get intelligence of the place, and whether anv of the rascals are there at night?"

"Can no one personate a fakeer?" said I; "a kulundur, anything will do. He might go up now, as the spot is close by, and bring us news in an hour or so."

"I have it," cried Bhudrinath. "Here, some one, call Shekhjee to me."

Shekhjee came. He was an old man, with a long beard; but he was an able fellow and a rare good hand with the handkerchief.

"Shekhjee," said Bhudrinath, "sit down, I have something to say to you. You can personate a fakeer, if necessary, can you not?"

"Certainly," replied the old fellow, "Moosulman or Hindoo, all kinds are familiar to me. I know all their forms of speech and have many of their dresses."

"It is well," said Bhudrinath; "now listen. You must go and disguise yourself this instant; we have an enterprise in view;" and he related our proposed scheme and what had preceded it. "And now," continued Bhudrinath, "you must be wary, and by dark you must return and tell us of the place and if there are men there."

"Is the fakeer who lives there a Hindoo or Moosulman?"

"I saw the impression of spread hands in white-wash on the rock, so he must be a Moosulman," said I.

"Then I know how to act," cried the Thug.

"Sahibs, I take my leave and will not fail you. I shall be with you by the time I am required."

As we were talking Surfuraz Khan came in.

"Ours has been a good business," he cried exultingly, "and there is good spoil. We have killed all the men, and the plunder is coming in charge of our fellows."

"That is so far good," said I; "but is there any ready money, or is it all goods?"

"Both Meer Sahib, both; but methinks you need not be so ready to ask, when we have not seen your face ever since we have been in the city. We might all have been taken and safely lodged in Puntoo Lall's huwelee for all you knew of the matter. I do not like such conduct."

I was enraged at his speech, and was about to make an angry reply when Bhudrinath interfered.

"Peace!" said he, "no brawls: it is disgraceful, and only fit for drunkards and smokers of ganja; listen to me. Surfuraz Khan, you are no boy, and ought not to let your anger have sway; listen, and hear what our young jemadar has been about, and I swear by Bhowanee I think he will yet put us all to shame."

He then related all I had told him, on hearing which Surfuraz Khan's angry feelings gave way in a moment; he rose and embraced me.

"I was wrong," said he, "and you must forgive me; and to prove that I am more than ever your friend, I beg you to allow me a place in this adventure, for, by Alla! it promises to be a strange one."

"Willingly," said I; "we thought you would not arrive in time, but now you are come I would not on any account that you did not accompany us."

In such conversation we continued till it was dusk, and then assembling the men we intended to take, eight in all, and seeing that our arms were in good order, we waited in great anxiety for the return of our emissary.

At last he came.

"There is no time to be lost," said he. "I went up to the place and found the fakeer. He is a fine

sturdy young fellow, and at first warned me to descend; but when I told him I was hungry and weary, that I had just arrived from Hindostan, and did not know where to lay my head, and begged for a crust of bread and water he was pacified, and admitted me into his cave, gave me some food and a hookah, and we sat carousing for some time. I pulled out my opium-box and took a very little; seeing it he begged for some, and has taken such a dose that he will not wake till morning. I left him fast asleep."

"He shall never wake again," said I; "but did you observe the place? Where can the plunder be hidden?"

"He lives in a cave, between two enormous rocks," said Shekhjee. "It was nearly all in darkness, but I saw a corner at the back of it built up with mud and stones, which he said was his sleeping-place, and I suspect it is there that the plunder is concealed."

"Come then," said I; "there is not a moment to be lost; if we delay we may chance to find the rest of the gang. This is just the hour at which they are all out in the bazars, stealing what they can."

We all sallied out, and conducted by our guide, crept stealthily along the foot of the rocks till we gained the narrow pathway by which we were to ascend.

We held a moment's conference in whispers, and bidding five of the men stay below until we should tell them to ascend, Bhudrinath, myself, and Surfuraz Khan crept up the narrow track to the mouth of the cave, whither the old Thug had preceded us.

"He still sleeps," said he in a whisper; "but tread softly, lest you wake him. He lies yonder, close by the lamp."

"Mind, he is mine," said I to Bhudrinath; "do you and Surfuraz Khan hold him;" for as I looked on the powerful form before me, I felt this precaution to be necessary. But he slept; how was I to throw the roomal about his neck? Bhudrinath solved the difficulty; he gave the fakeer a smart

blow with the flat of his sheathed sword upon the stomach, and the fellow started up to a sitting posture.

"What is this? Thieves!" was all he could say; my handkerchief was ready, and now it never failed me—he was dead in an instant.

"Now trim the lamp," said I to Bhudrinath. "Call up three of the men, and let the others remain below to look out."

Bhudrinath tore a piece of rag off the clothes of the dead fakeer, which he twisted up into a thick wick and put into the oil vessel; its strong glare lighted up the interior of the cave, and we saw everything distinctly.

"Here is the wall which I spoke of," said Shekhjee, "and we had better search behind it."

We did so. There were piles of earthen jars in one corner, which we at first supposed to contain grain or flour, and indeed the first two we uncovered had rice and dal in them; the third felt heavy.

"This has something in it beyond rice," said I; "examine it closely." The mouth was stuffed with rags, but when they were removed we beheld it filled with money—rupees and pice mixed together.

"This was not wise," said Bhudrinath; "the Shah Sahib ought not to have mixed his copper and silver, the silver will be tarnished; but we can clean it."

The next pot was the same; the last was the best: it was full of gold and silver ornaments, rings, anklets, and armlets We shuddered to see that many of them were stained with blood.

"The villains!" I exclaimed; "that wretch then told the truth when he confessed himself to be a murderer; the city is well rid of him. But we must not stand talking. Do one of you tie these things up and be ready for a start, while we look out for further spoil."

But there was nothing else in this corner, no bales of cloth or other articles as we had expected. We were looking about to find any other place of concealment, and had nearly given up our search,

when Surfuraz Khan, who had gone outside, called to us.

"Come here," he cried; "there is a place here which looks suspicious."

We ran to the spot, and found the hole he had discovered to be between two rocks; it was dark within, and a man could but just enter by crawling upon his hands and knees.

"Give me the light," said I; "I will enter it."

I found no one, and the space within, which was so low that I could scarcely stand upright, was filled with bundles.

"Neither the devil" or any of the gang are here," cried I to those outside, "so do some of you come in quickly and see what I have found."

I set myself to work, as did also the others, to untie the different bundles, and we were all busily employed. I had just opened one which contained, as I thought, brass cooking-pots and water-vessels, and was overjoyed to find some gold and other silver, when the alarm was given from outside. We all got out as quickly as we could and inquired the cause.

"There are two men," said the scouts, "whom we have watched come round the corner of the houses yonder and approach the bottom of the rocks; they do not walk fast, and appear to be carrying loads of something."

"Only two," said I, "then they are easily managed. Put out the light, and conceal yourselves at the entrance of the cave; we must fall upon them as they enter."

We had just taken our posts behind a rock which was close to the mouth, our roomals ready, and two with their swords drawn, when one of the fellows called out, "Ho! Sein! Sein! come down and help us up. Here we are, laden like pulla-wallas, and thou hast not even a light to show us the way."

"Not a word," said I, "as you value your lives. Let them come."

In a few moments more they both reached the

platform and threw down their bundles, which clanked as they fell.

"Where is this drunken rascal?" said one, a tall fellow as big as the one we had killed. "No light for us, and I warrant the brute has either smoked himself dead drunk or is away at the bhungkhana just when he is wanted."

The other sat down, apparently fairly tired and out of breath.

"Go inside," said he; "you will find the lamp and cruse of oil behind the wall. I will not stir an inch."

The first speaker entered, cursing and abusing the fakeer. Surfuraz Khan and I rushed on him and despatched him; but the other hearing the scuffle cried out and attempted to escape. He was not fated to do so, however: his foot slipped, or he stumbled over one of the bundles he had brought, and fell, and before he could rise had received his death-wound by a cut in the neck from one of the men behind the rock, who darted out upon him.

"Enough of this work," said I; "we had better be off; first, however, let us pay one more visit to the hole and get what we can, and do one of you see what is in the bundles."

We again entered the hole, and each taking a bundle we got out. Those the fellows had brought only contained cooking-pots and a few cloths, so we left them behind, and made the best of our way to the serai laden with our booty.

I have forgotten to tell you, sahib, how many more proofs we discovered in that cave of the wicked trade of these villains. Many of the bundles were of wearing apparel, and most of them covered with blood. One that I opened was quite saturated; and as the still wet gore stuck to my fingers, I dropped it with mingled disgust and horror.

CHAPTER VII

FRESH ADVENTURES.

1—*Misfortune.*

WHEN we returned we had a good laugh over our success. The adventure was novel to us all; and we pictured to ourselves the mortification and chagrin of the robbers, when they should arrive, at finding their stronghold plundered of all its valuables, and their friends lying dead at the threshold, instead of being ready to receive them and recount their adventures of the evening.

As a better place of security, I took the jewels and silver vessels I had found to our house and locked them up in the strong-room, to be disposed of afterwards as best they might be.

My father, I need not say, was overpowered with joy; and every new feat that I performed seemed to render me more dear to him. He caressed me as though I had still been a child.

" Wait till these actions are known in Hindostan, my son," said he with enthusiasm; " I am much mistaken indeed if they do not raise you to a rank which has been attained by few,—that of subadar."

I did not reply to him, but I made an inward determination to venture everything to attain it. I was aware that nothing but a very successful expedition, coupled with large booty and a deed of some notoriety and daring, could raise me to the rank my father had mentioned; but that it could be attained I had no doubt, since others had reached it before me: and why should not I, whose whole soul was bent upon winning fame through deeds which men should tremble to hear?

Two days after our adventure at the robbers' cave, the whole of the karwan and adjacent neighbourhood were thrown into great excitement from the discovery of the dead bodies by their smell and the number of vultures they attracted. Various were the conjectures as to the perpetrators of the violent deed, and many attributed it to the treachery of some of the band of robbers; however, all agreed that a great benefit had been done by unknown agents. Much of the stolen property was recovered; among it was some of great value which had been stolen from a sahoukar a short time before, and which in our hurry and confusion had escaped us; but, as it was, we had got a considerable booty. All the gold and silver was secretly melted into lumps by one of our men who understood how to do it, and it was valued by weight at upwards of seven thousand rupees.

My father now talked of leaving the city; but I entreated a further stay of ten days, as, in concert with Bhudrinath and Surfuraz Khan, I had laid out a plan for dividing our gang into four portions, one to take post on each side of the city, and to exercise our vocation separately, the proceeds to be deposited as collected in one place, and to be divided when we could no longer carry on our work.

The plan was favourably received by him, and that day it was put into execution. We paid the trifling rent of our house, and on the pretence that we were about to leave the city and return to Hindostan, quitted the karwan and took up our quarters on the other side, in a suburb which bordered upon the Meer Joomla tank. Bhudrinath and his party went into the Chuddar Ghat bazar, near the magnificent mansion of the Resident; as, being a grand thoroughfare, it was frequented by numerous travellers, and from thence branched off many roads, both to the north and east. Surfuraz Khan with eight men continued at the karwan, as he was less known than we were. Another large party took post on the western road from the city

towards Shumshabad, under Peer Khan and Motee-ram, who were resolved by their exertions to merit the trust which had been confided to them.

Our plan succeeded wonderfully; not a day passed in which the destruction of several parties was not reported; and though the booty gained was inconsiderable, yet it was probably as much as we could expect, and it was all collected and deposited in our new abode, from whence my father disposed of such as met a ready sale.

I pass over my own share in these little affairs. I had thought, when I selected the quarter I did, that there would have been more work than turned out to be the case; I was disappointed in the small share which fell to my lot, in despite of my utmost exertions to the contrary, and entreated Bhudrinath or Surfuraz Khan to exchange places with me. They, however, would not: they had laid their own plans; and as I had myself selected my station I had no right to any other, nor ought I to have been dissatisfied.

It was very early in the morning of the eighth day after we had commenced operations, that Bhudrinath came to me in great alarm.

"We must fly," said he; "the city is no longer safe for us."

"How?" I asked in astonishment; "what has happened? Has aught been discovered, or have any of the band proved faithless and denounced us?"

"I will tell you," replied Bhudrinath; "it is a sad affair—some of our best men are taken and in confinement. You know Surfuraz Khan to be daring, far beyond the bounds of discretion, and that for this reason few hitherto have liked to trust themselves to his guidance; and but for this fault he would ere now have been one of our leading jemadars, for he is a Thug by descent of many generations, and his family has always been powerful."

"But the matter," cried I impatiently.

"Nay, I was not going to make a story about it," said Bhudrinath mildly, for nothing could provoke him, "so do not lose your temper; but listen. Surfuraz Khan, then, yesterday evening had got hold of two sahoukars, who were on the eve of departure for Aurungabad; he persuaded them to put up in the serai with him, and they were to start the next morning. They were supposed to be rich, as their effects in two panniers were brought into the serai, and carefully watched by them. By some unlucky chance, just as the evening set in, they were visited by two or three other merchants whom they seemed to know, and who persuaded them to wait for another week, and to join them in their journey up country. To the extreme mortification of Surfuraz Khan they agreed to the proposal; but as they said there would be danger in removing their bags from the serai at night, they told their friends they would sleep there, and join them in the morning. Surfuraz Khan, I hear, made every exertion by persuasion to induce them to alter their determination, but in vain. So you know there remained but one alternative, which was to put them to death in the serai, and to dispose of the bodies as well as they could; besides, the circumstance of the men being afraid to risk their bags by removal at night, looked as though they were of value. I must own, Meer Sahib, it was tempting; it would even have been so for you or me,—how much more for the Khan! Had he even waited till towards morning, done the business, and started, leaving the bodies where they were, he could have got clean off with the booty, which was large, and he could have come round the back of the city and joined you or me; any one of us could have taken his post in the karwan, and no one would have been at all suspicious. But no, he did not reflect; the men were killed almost immediately after their friends left, and their bags plundered. As it is, we have got some of the spoil in the shape of two strings of pearls, but the best are gone."

"And how was the matter discovered? you have not said."

"Why," continued Bhudrinath, "one of the sahoukars' friends shortly after returned with a message. Surfuraz Khan made some excuse that they had gone, but would soon return. The fellow waited for a long time; but at last growing suspicious he went away, and returned with the others, who insisted upon a search for their friends. Surfuraz Khan had contrived to bury the bodies in the yard, but some articles were found on his person which had been theirs; and the upshot of the whole was, that they were all marched off to the city by a guard which was summoned from somewhere or other for the purpose, except one of them, by name Himmat Khan, one of Surfuraz's own people, who happened to be absent."

"It is a sad business truly," said I, "and I do not exactly see what is to be done to extricate them."

"Nor I," replied Bhudrinath; "but this evil comes of not taking the omens, nor attending properly to them when they are taken."

"Nonsense!" said I; "you are always prating about these foolish omens, as if success lay in them more than in stout hearts and cunning plans. I believe them not."

"You will rue it then one day or other," said Bhudrinath; "depend upon it you will rue it. I tell you I could mention a hundred instances of the disastrous effects of disregard of omens, and what I say will be readily confirmed by your father."

"Perform the ceremonies by all means," said I; "you and my father know how to do so. My ignorance might mar your object, so I will keep away from you till they are over."

"You are right, it might, and I am glad to hear you at length speak reasonably; where is your father?"

"You will find him asleep within," said I, "and you had better go to him."

Sahib, the sacrifices were made, the omens watched, and declared to be favourable. What

they were I know not; I cared so little about these ceremonies then that I did not go near them, or even ask what had been done. It was only in after days that their value and importance were impressed upon me by a series of misfortunes which were no doubt sent to check my presumption; since then my faith in them has been steadfast, as you shall hereafter learn.

2—*The Rescue.*

My father and Bhudrinath returned to me with joyful countenances. "Bhowanee is propitious," said they, "in spite of this little display of her anger. The truth is, we have in some manner neglected her; but she is now satisfied."

"Since that is the case," said I, "we had better be stirring and doing something for the poor fellows; but what to do I know not. When did you say they were seized, Bhudrinath?"

"About the middle of the night."

"Then they are now in confinement somewhere or other, and it will be impossible to effect their release by day. A bribe I dare not offer, for they say Hussein Ali Khan, the kotwal, is an upright man. When is it likely they will be brought before him?"

"I know not," said Bhudrinath, "but it can easily be ascertained"; and he went into the street, and soon returned: "I asked an old bunnea the question, or rather at what time the kotwal held his durbar, and he told me in the first and second watches of the night."

"Then," said I, "they must be rescued by force, and I will do it."

"Impossible!" cried both at once.

"But I tell you I will do it," said I; "where is Himmat Khan? With him and six of our best men I will do it, if they will stand by me. Do any of them know the kotwal's house?"

They were summoned, but none knew it.

"Then," said I, "I will go even now and find it out, and will return when my plan is perfected."

"And I will go and bring some of my men," said Bhudrinath; "I will be back by noon."

"See that they bring their swords and shields, Bhudrinath; some of them may volunteer to accompany me."

"I will do so for one, Meer Sahib; I have confidence in you in spite of your want of faith"; and he laughed.

I went into the city, and easily got a person to show me the kotwal's habitation. It was in a long, narrow street, which did not appear much of a thoroughfare. This exactly suited my purpose, for we could have done little in a crowded place. It seemed very practicable to surprise the men who should escort our friends, and I had no doubt if suddenly attacked, they would scamper off, and leave their prisoners to their fate.

I returned and laid the result of my inquiries before my father. He was not averse to the undertaking, but was in much alarm at the prominent part I should have to play, and the chance of our being defeated.

Towards evening, therefore, myself, Bhudrinath, and six others, two of whom were Rajpoots, who swore to die rather than come back unsuccessful, went into the city. We separated but kept in view of each other, and they all followed me to the street in which the kotwal resided. There we lounged about for some hours, and I grew very impatient. Would they ever come? Had they even before this been tried, condemned, and cast into prison? were questions I asked myself a thousand times. That the durbar was being held, I knew by the number of persons who went in and came out of the house, but still there were no signs of our brethren.

I was sitting listlessly in the shop of a tumbolee, almost the only one in the street, when Himmat Khan came up to me. I saw by his face that he had news, and descended from the chubootra upon which the man exposed his goods, and turned round a dark corner.

"They come," said he, panting for breath from anxiety. "I have been watching one end of the street and Khoseal Sing the other; they are coming by my end, and will be now about half way up."

"And by whom are they guarded?" I asked.

"Oh," said he, "a parcel of line-wallas, about twenty soldiers with old muskets; we could cut through a hundred of them."

"Have they their bayonets fixed?" I inquired.

"They have; but what of that? they are cowardly rascals, and, you will see, will run away."

"Then," said I, "run and tell Bhudrinath, who is yonder; tell him to walk down that side, I will go down this; when we are near them I will give the jhirnee."

My four men had now joined me, as I told them to do if they saw me speak to any one; Bhudrinath was joined by his, and by Khoseal Sing who had given up his watch at the other end and arrived at the critical moment. Our parties proceeded down the street exactly opposite to each other. I thought not of danger, though it was the first time I had ever drawn a sword in anger against a fellow creature, and I was about to precipitate myself into what might be a sudden and desperate combat. Our shields apparently hung loosely and easily on our arms, but they were tightly grasped, and our swords were free in their scabbards. I saw the party approach; they marched carelessly, and had not the arms of my companions been tightly bound, and the whole tied together by a rope, which the leader of the party held in his hand, they might have easily escaped.

Our men joined together in the middle of the street, and when we were close to the coming party, I cried in a loud tone, "Bhaee Pan lao!" It was the signal: our swords flashed from their scabbards, and we threw ourselves on the sepoys. I cut right and left, and two men fell; the others were as successful. I rushed to the prisoners, and a few strokes of my sword and of those who were nearest cut their bonds and they were free. As Himmat

Khan had said, the whole of the sepoys fled on the instant of the attack.

"Fly to the gates, my brothers, or they will be shut!" I cried; "fly through these narrow dark streets; no one will know who you are nor trouble themselves about you."

We all dispersed in an instant. I cast a hurried look around me as I returned my sword into its scabbard, and saw five poor wretches lying on the ground and groaning. It was enough; I too fled down the nearest street which offered, reached the gate I had entered by, and when I got on the embankment of the Meer Joomla Tank, I plunged among the gardens and enclosures which are below it, and by the various lanes which led through them soon reached my father's house.

The attack on the escort of the prisoners, sahib, was so sudden, and over so quickly, that I can give you but a faint idea how soon it was made and finished. It occupied less time than I have taken to tell it, and I have often wondered since that the noise and confusion not only caused by us, but by a few passengers who witnessed the fray, did not alarm the whole street, and cause the inhabitants to rise on us.

By morning all our companions were present at the different places of rendezvous; but thinking we were no longer safe about the city, my father sent them all out of the way to the camp at Hassain Sagor, where he bade them wait, for we knew that it would never be searched for us.

Nothing now remained to detain us but to dispose of the plunder we had gained during the last ten days and there was none of much value: a few strings of pearls, several shawls, and some unset precious stones were the best, and they were soon sold; the gold and silver as before had been melted down.

The day after the rescue of our brethren we held a consultation, at which the principal members of the band were present. I need not relate particulars; suffice it to say, that all agreed in thinking we had remained long enough consistently with our

safety, and it was resolved to depart in the course of the next day, or at most the day after. One by one the parties, as they were then divided, were to take the nearest road towards Beeder, which led through Puttuncherroo; and the last mentioned place was to be the rendezvous whence we should proceed in company.

Little time therefore remained to me; and as soon as I possibly could I took Bhudrinath and Moteeram with me, and we went into the city. We sat down on the steps of the Char Minar. Wonderful indeed were the stories we heard of our skirmish with the kotwal's soldiers; the accounts of the killed and wounded on each side were ludicrously inconsistent, and you may imagine how we enjoyed the various relations we heard, all either from persons who declared they had been eye-witnesses of the matter, or who had heard it from undoubted authority. But it was not our errand to waste time by listening to idle tales, not one of which contained a word of truth, but to get the money for the bills we had found among the effects of Syud Mahomed Ali.

3—*A Fair Lady in Distress.*

"For the love of Alla, young man!" cried a low and sweet voice as I passed under the gateway of a respectable-looking house; "for the love of Alla, enter, and save my mistress!"

Fresh adventures, thought I, as I looked at the speaker, a young girl, dressed like a slave. "Who are you?"

"It matters not," said the speaker; "did you not pass this way yesterday afternoon, in company with two others?"

"I did, and what of that?"

"Everything; my mistress, who is more beautiful than the moon at its full, saw you and has gone mad about you."

"I am sorry," said I, "but I do not see how I can help her."

"But you must," said the girl; "you must, or she will die. Follow me, and I will lead you to her."

I hesitated, for I had heard strange stories of lures spread for unwary persons—how they were enticed into houses and then murdered. But the thought was only momentary. "Courage! Ameer Ali," said I to myself; "trust to your good fate and follow it up."

"Look you," said I to the girl, "you see I am well armed. I will follow you; but if violence is shown, those who oppose me will feel the edge of a sharp sword."

"I swear by your head," said the girl, "there is no danger. My lord is gone into the country, and has taken all the men with him; there is no one in the house beside myself but two slaves and three old women."

"Then lead on," said I; "I follow you."

She entered the gateway and conducted me through a court into an open room, where sat a girl, richly dressed and of great beauty; but she covered herself immediately with her dooputta, and cried when she saw me, "Ya Alla! it is he; am I so fortunate?"

"Yes, lady," said I, "your slave is at your feet, and prays you to remove that veil which hides a houri of paradise from the gaze of a true believer."

"Go," said she faintly; "now that you are here I dare not look on you. Go, in the name of Alla! what will you not have thought of me?"

"That your slave is the most favoured of his race," said I; "I beseech you to look on me, and then bid me depart if you will."

"I cannot," said the fair girl, "I cannot, I dare not; ah, nurse, what have you made me do?"

The old woman made me a sign to take the veil from her face, and I did so gently. She faintly opposed me, but it was in vain. In an instant I had removed it, and a pair of the loveliest eyes I had ever seen fixed their trembling gaze upon me—another, and I had clasped her to my heart.

"I know not what you will think of me, sahib,"

she said, " and I am at a loss how to confess that I was enamoured of you as I saw you pass my house yesterday; but so it was. My liver turned to water as I looked on your beauty, and I pined for you till my attendants thought I should have died. They said they would watch for you, and Alla has heard my prayer and sent you."

" He has sent a devoted slave," said I; " Speak, and I will do your bidding."

" Hear my history, and you will know then how I am to be pitied," said the fair girl; " and it is told in a few words. I was the daughter of humble parents, but I was as you see me—they say I am beautiful; they married me to my husband,—so they said,—but they sold me. Sahib, he is old, he is a tyrant, he has beaten me with his shoe, and I have sworn on his Koran that I will no longer remain under his roof. Yes, I have sworn it. I would have fled yesterday, but I saw you, and I prayed Alla to send you, and he has done so. Now think of me what you please, but save me!" And she arose, and throwing herself at my feet clasped my knees. " You will not refuse me protection? if you do, and your heart is hard towards me, one thing alone remains—I have prepared a bitter draught, and to-morrow's sun will look upon my dead body."

" Alla forbid! lady," said I. " He who has sent me to you has sent you a willing and a fearless slave; fly with me this instant, and I will lead you to a father who will welcome you, and a land far away where our flight will never be discovered."

" Now—so soon?" she exclaimed.

" Ay, lady, now; leave your house this moment; I will protect you with my life."

" I dare not, sahib, I dare not; ah, what would become of us if we were discovered? You would escape, but I—you know a woman's fate if she is detected in intrigue."

" Then what can be done?" said I. " Alas! I am a stranger in the city, and know not what to advise."

"I will call my nurse; let us leave all to her,—Kulloo!"

The old woman entered. "What are your commands?" said she.

"Listen," said I; "I love your fair charge with an intensity of passion; this is no place for us to give ourselves up to love, for there is danger, and we must fly; I am a stranger in the city, and am on the eve of departure for my home, which is in Hindostan, and whither I will convey her safely; she is willing to accompany me, and your aid and advice are all that is required."

"What can I do? what can I do?" cried the nurse; "alas, I am helpless; what can an old woman like me do?"

"Anything, everything," I exclaimed; "woman's wit never yet failed at a pinch."

"Did you not say you had made a vow to visit the durgah of Hoosain Shah Wullee?" cried Azeema; "and did not you say you would take me to present a nuzzur at the shrine of the holy saint, if I recovered from my last illness?"

"Thou hast hit it, my rose," said the nurse; "I had forgotten my vow. Sahib, can you meet us at the durgah to-morrow at noon?"

"Assuredly," said I, "I will be present. Good nurse, do not fail us, and another fifty shall be added to the hundred I have already promised."

"May your condescension and generosity increase!" cried she. "Sahib, I have loved this fair girl from her infancy, and though it will go sorely against my heart, I will give her into your hands rather than she should be further exposed to the indignities she has already undergone."

"Thanks, thanks, good nurse, I believe you; but swear on her head that you will not break your faith."

"I swear," said the old woman, placing her hands on Azeema's head, "I swear she shall be thine."

"Enough," I cried, "I am content; now, one embrace and I leave you. I shall be missed by my

father, and he will think I am murdered in this wild city."

"To-morrow," I cried, "and at the durgah we will meet, never again to part. So cheer thee, my beloved, and rouse all your energies for what is before you. To-morrow will be an eventful day to us both."

"It will, it will," cried the nurse; "fear not for anything. Nurgiz is faithful, and shall accompany us; the rest are long ago asleep, and know not you are here. But now begone; further delay is dangerous, and Nurgiz will lead you to the street."

She called, and the same slave who had ushered me in led the way to the door.

"By your soul, noble sir, by your father and mother, do not be unfaithful, or it will kill her."

"I need not swear, pretty maiden," said I "your mistress's beauty has melted my heart, and I am hers for ever."

"Then may Alla protect you, stranger! That is your road, if you go by the one you came yesterday."

I turned down the street and was soon at home. My father was asleep, and I lay down.

Our prayers finished, I related next morning my adventures of the past night. When I came to that with Azeema, his countenance was changed and troubled. However, he heard me to the end without interruption, and I augured favourably from it. I concluded all by throwing myself at his feet and imploring his sanction to our union.

"You have gone too far to retract, Ameer Ali," said he. "If you do not fulfil your promise to Azeema she will drink the poison she has prepared; you will be one cause of her death, and it will lie heavy on your conscience; therefore on this account I give you my sanction. I am now old, a few years must see my end, and all I have long wished for is to marry you respectably and to see your children. I endeavoured to effect a marriage-contract in Hindostan before we left, but I was unable to do so. There is now no occasion for

one; you have made your choice and must abide by it; Alla has sent you your bride and you must take her—take her with my blessing; and you say she is beautiful, in which you are fortunate. Money you will want, as you have promised some to her nurse; if she is faithful, give her from me an additional fifty rupees; and you had better take gold with you,—it will be easier carried."

"Spoken like my beloved and honoured father!" I exclaimed, "and I am now happy. I ask your blessing, and leave you to carry our plans into execution. We shall meet again at Puttuncherroo in the evening."

"Inshalla! we shall," he replied. "Be wary and careful. I apprehend no danger, but you had better take some men with you."

"I will," said I, as I rose to depart; "I will take some of my own, whom I can trust"; and I left him.

My horse was soon ready and my men prepared; but some conveyance was necessary for Azeema, and I ran to a house a short distance off where dwelt a man who had a cart for hire.

"Come," said I, "Fazil, I am ready and the time is come."

"And the lady?" said the fellow, grinning.

"Ah, she is ready too; only make haste, we have not a moment to lose."

"Give me twenty rupees for my mother, and I will harness the bullocks and put in the cushions and pillows."

"Here they are," said I; "now be quick—by your soul, be quick!"

"I will be back instantly," said he; and he disappeared inside his house, but returned almost immediately with the cushions and curtains of his cart.

"There," said he, as he completed his preparations and jumped on the pole, where was his driving-seat, "you see I have not been long. Now whither shall I drive? to the city?"

"No," said I; "to Hussain Shah Wullee's durgah. Do you precede, and we will follow you, for I know not the road."

"I know it well," said he; "follow me closely."

"Does it lead through the Begum Bazar or the karwan?" I asked.

"Through both, or either, just as you please."

"And is there no other way?"

"There is, but it is somewhat longer. We must go by the English Residence and turn up towards the Gosha Mahal; the road will lead us far behind both the karwan and Begum Bazar."

"That will do," said I; "I wish to avoid both."

"Bismilla! then," cried the driver, "let us proceed"; and twisting the tails of his bullocks, a few gentle hints from his toes about their hind-quarters set them off into a trot, which however they exchanged for a more sober pace before we had got far. I allowed him to proceed to some distance, and then put my small party in motion.

4—*The Escape.*

WE soon passed the suburbs of the city, and held on our way towards the durgah. I was not without hope that we might fall in with Azeema on the road; but in this I was disappointed. As we passed over the brow of an eminence, the tombs of the kings of Golconda broke on our sight, occupying the whole of a rising ground in front. I had never before seen them, indeed I knew not of their existence, and they were the more striking on this account. I was astonished at their size and magnificence, even from that distance; but how much more so when we approached them nearer! We had plenty of time before us, and I proposed, if the durgah should not be much farther, to diverge from the road and examine them. I rode up to the driver of the cart, and asked him how far we were from the place of our destination.

"You cannot see the durgah yet," said the man, "but it is just behind the tombs, on the border of a large tank. You cannot miss it: you will see its

white dome and gilt spire above the tamarind trees which surround it."

"Very good," said I; "do you go on thither, and if you are asked any questions, say that you belong to a party which is coming out from the city. We shall go to the tombs, and will join you shortly."

The driver kept to the road, and we, diverging from it, directed our way to the mausoleums of the departed kings. As we approached them, their immense size, and the beautiful groups which they assumed as our point of view shifted, struck forcibly on the mind, while the desolation around them added to their solemn appearance.

"What a pity," said Peer Khan, who accompanied me, "that the good people of the city do not make gardens about these proud buildings! The spot seems to be utterly neglected, even as a burying-ground."

"They are better as they are," said I; "the dust of the present miserable generation would hardly mix with that of so noble a one as that which has left such a monument of its glory. Ay," continued I, as we entered the first immense tomb, "these were kings and princes, who lie here; men who won their kingdoms at the sword's point, and kept them—how different to the present degenerate race, who are indebted for the bread they eat to the generosity of the Feringhees!"

We ascended by a narrow stair to the top of the tomb, and from the terrace out of which the huge dome proudly reared itself the view of the city was superb; but it was not equal to the one I have before described to you, for we saw none of the white buildings; the Mecca Mosque and the Char Minar were alone distinguishable over the mass of trees, if I except the innumerable white minarets which rose out from the foliage in every direction. From the other side of the terrace the whole of the large tombs were seen at a glance—each by itself a noble and striking object, but rendered still more so when grouped with others of smaller size, whose

contrast increased their massiveness. Not a creature was to be seen; the old fort itself, its grey mouldering walls covering the face of a huge pile of rocks, seemed tenantless, and was in unison with the abodes of the illustrious dead who had built it.

The silence and desolation were oppressive, and we scarcely made a remark to each other, as we traversed one by one the interiors of the noble edifices,—some of them dark and gloomy, and filled with bats and wild pigeons, whose cooing re-echoed within the lofty domes; and others whose wide arches admitted the light of day, and were more cheerful in appearance.

"Enough," said I, after we had examined some of the largest; "we do but loiter here while we may even now be expected. Yonder is the durgah, and we had better go to it and be prepared, she cannot now be long absent."

I saw as we approached the sacred edifice that our cart was ready; but there was no other, and my mind somewhat misgave me that Azeema had been unable to keep her appointment, and I resolved within myself that, should she not arrive before noon, I would return to the city and seek my bride, for such I now considered her. I could not leave so lovely a creature to the rude treatment she would experience from him to whom she was united—one who was undeserving to possess a jewel such as she was; but it was still early, and perhaps some hours must elapse before she could reach the durgah, which was farther from the city than I had anticipated.

I entered the holy precincts, and after offering up a gift upon the shrine of the saint, I put up a fervent prayer that the object we had come for should end successfully. This done, I sat down under the shade of the trees, and entered into conversation with one of the many moollas who attended on the tomb, and who were constantly employed in reading the Koran over the grave of the saint. He asked me who I was. I told him I belonged to the city, and had brought my wife

to perform a vow to the saint, on her recovering from a dangerous illness. "But she is not yet come," said I; "I rode on with some of my attendants, and she will follow, and will soon be here."

Hour after hour passed, and yet Azeema did not come. Sahib, I was in a torment of suspense and anxiety. Could she have met with any misfortune? could her lord have returned home unexpectedly? could she have played me false? Ah, not the last! her grief, her misery, were too strong to be feigned, and what object could she have had in dissembling? Noon came, and the music of the nobut began to play,—still no signs of her. My patience was fairly exhausted, and I went to the place where my horse stood, mounted him, and bidding the men remain where they were, I rode on towards the city. I had scarcely got beyond the small village by which the durgah was surrounded, when I saw three carts with curtains to them carefully closed approaching. My heart beat quickly with hope, and I determined to return; one of them surely is hers, thought I, and I will await her coming in the durgah.

"She comes!" cried I to Peer Khan, as he eagerly asked the cause of my quick return, "She comes! Bid Fazil have his cart in readiness, and take it round to the gate which leads towards Puttuncherroo."

I dismounted and stood at the gate.

In a few moments more the cart I so longed to see turned the corner of some projecting houses, and advanced slowly towards the gate. How my heart throbbed! Was it her, my life, my soul, or was I doomed to a third disappointment? It stopped, and I could have fallen down and worshipped the old nurse, who first emerged from the closely-curtained vehicle; I ran towards her, but was stopped by the driver.

"It is a zenana, noble sir," he said, "and courtesy requires you to go out of sight, lest their faces should be seen in descending."

"Peace, fool! the women are my own."

"That alters the case," said the man; "and my lord's displeasure must not fall on his slave for this delay. The axletree cracked in passing a rivulet, which is a circumstance no foresight could have prevented, seeing that it was newly fitted after the Mohorum."

"It matters not," said I; "but you may now leave us. I will return and pay you your hire: there is an empty cart yonder which I will engage for them to return in."

The fellow retired to a short distance, and my breath went and came as I put my head into the curtains and saw my beloved sitting unveiled, beautiful beyond description, and her fine features glowing with the excitement of her success.

"Can you support the fatigue of further travel, Azeema?" said I.

"I am strong and can bear anything, so I am with thee and thou with me," she replied. "Dearest, I am now secure; but oh the suspense I have endured since I last saw you, and until I was fairly out of that vile city!"

"Tell me," said I, "how did you contrive to elude suspicion?"

"When you left us," replied Azeema, "I thought my happiness had fled for ever; I would have given worlds to have called you back, and to have fled with you then. I had seen your noble face, I had heard your vows of love; Alla had sent me a lover such as my warmest fancy had painted to me, while I was daily suffering torments which the fond and loving only can feel, when their affection is returned by severe and bitter insult; and I thought I had lost him, that I had only gained a few moments of bliss, which would appear like one of those dreams that had often cheated my sleeping fancy, to leave me when I awoke to the bitter realities of my sad lot—and I was inconsolable; but my kind old nurse and Nurgiz soothed me. They told me they would die for me, and assured me you would be faithful; so I gathered courage, and Kulloo proposed that we should make immediate

preparations for flight. We packed up some clothes and my jewels, and all the money which had been left with us,—a few hundred rupees,—and before morning we lay down to take a little sleep. At daylight Kulloo told the other slaves and the two old servants that I was going to this durgah, and sent one of them for a cart; it came about sunrise, and concealing the articles we had packed up in two large bundles of carpets and sheets, which we said we should require to sit on at the durgah, we put them into the cart, got in ourselves, and the driver made the best of his way thither."

She had just spoken, when Kulloo came to us.

"All is prepared," said she. "I have dismissed the other cart, and your new one is now ready;—do not delay."

There was no occasion for her to hurry us, we were as well inclined to set off as she was, and we rose and followed her.

The cart was ready—my men with it, and Nurgiz already inside. Azeema got in, and her old nurse followed.

"You too?" cried I.

"Yes, Meer Sahib; my home is at Beeder whither I will accompany you; the city is no longer safe for me: my life would be forfeited were I ever to enter it again, and fall in with Nusrut Ali Khan, whose house is now dishonoured.

"Drive on," I exclaimed to Fazil; "go as fast as you can; we must reach Puttuncherroo before night-fall."

The road from the durgah, after passing the tank upon which it was situated, led through a wild pass; piles of rocks frowned over us, and the road was at times so narrow that the cart could scarcely proceed.

"A rare place for a little work," said I to Peer Khan, as we reached a low barrier-wall thrown across the road, and pierced with holes for musketry; "many a wild deed has been done here in times past, I'll warrant."

"They tell queer stories of the place," he re-

plied; "and we have used it ourselves in some of our late expeditions from the city. There lie the seven bunneas you heard of," and he pointed out a remarkable rock not far from the road. "A sad business we had with the grave: it was all rock underneath, and the bodies were hardly covered; but who asks about them in this country? Why, as we accompanied the travellers, we saw lying in this very pass the bodies of two men who had been murdered and dreadfully mangled."

"Well," said I, "we have left our marks behind us at any rate, and all things considered we have been lucky. It matters not if we get no more bunij all the way to Hindostan."

"We have enough to make us comfortable for some years," said he; "nevertheless one's hand gets out of practice, and you are but young at the work; the more you have for a few years to come, the better."

We reached Puttuncherroo late in the evening, and to my inexpressible joy found my father and the whole band safely arrived, and comfortably encamped under a large banian tree, by which was a fakeer's tomb. One of our small tents had been pitched for Azeema, and after seeing her settled for the night I joined my father.

"You are a lucky fellow," said he, when I had told him of all my success; "I have been in anxious suspense about you, especially when the evening set in and you came not; but now there is no danger, we are once again in the country and the roads are our own. And now tell me, what is your new bride like?"

"She is handsome," said I; "the full moon is not more beautiful. You must see her to-morrow; she is now fatigued with travel.

Our party was soon in motion, and as the light increased with the dawning day, it revealed to me the person and dress of the nuwab, who now rode by my side. He was mounted on a splendid bay horse, which moved proudly and spiritedly beneath his noble master; the trappings of the ani-

mal were of crimson velvet, somewhat soiled, but still exceedingly handsome, for the saddlecloth and headstall were embroidered with gold thread in a rich pattern.

But the rider chiefly attracted my observation. He wore a shirt of mail, composed of the finest steel links, exquisitely polished, over his ordinary clothes; at his waist it was confined by a handsome green shawl, which he had tied round him, and in which were stuck two or three daggers, mounted in gold and silver. His arms were cased in steel gauntlets, as far as the elbows, and greaves of steel protected his thighs. On his head was a bright steel cap, from the top of which a crimson silk tassel depended, and a shawl handkerchief was folded round it to protect his head from the heat of the sun. At his back hung a shield of rhinoceros hide, richly painted and gilt; a long sword hung at his side from an embroidered velvet belt which passed over his shoulder; and at his saddle-bow was fastened a small battle-axe, with a long and brightly polished steel handle.

We reached our first stage without any adventure. Beyond it the village told us that the jungle grew thicker and thicker, that the road was very bad and stony, and above all, that the Gónds were in arms, and plundered all whom they met with.

"Let them try us," said the nuwab as he listened to the relations, "let them try us! Inshalla! they will do us no harm, and it may be some of them will get broken crowns for their pains."

But the next morning we moved with more caution; our men were desired to keep well together, and I picked out a trusty few to surround the cart, which moved on with difficulty over the rough and stony roads; the nuwab and myself rode at the head of the party.

As we advanced, the road grew wilder and wilder; in many places it was narrowed almost to a footpath, and the men were obliged to cut away the branches, which often nearly met across the road, so as to allow the cart to proceed. At

other times it ran between high banks, which almost overhung us, and from which missiles might have been showered on our heads, without a possibility of our being able to strike a blow in self-defence.

"That was an ugly place, Nuwab Sahib," said I, as we emerged from one of these narrow passes into a more open country, though still covered with jungle; "had we been attacked there we should assuredly have fallen victims"

"It was indeed," said he; "and I am thankful we have got out of it; if I remember aright, it has a bad name. From hence, however, I think there are no more; the jungle becomes a forest, and there is not so much underwood. But look," cried he, "what is that? The Gónds are upon us." And his glittering blade flashed from the scabbard. Checking his horse, and at the same time touching its flanks with his heels, the animal made two or three bounds, after which the nuwab fixed himself firmly in his seat, pressed down his cap upon his head, and cried to me to be ready.

I was not behindhand; my sword was drawn and my shield disengaged, which I placed before me to guard me from the arrows. A few bounds of my horse, which was scarcely second to the nuwab's, brought me to his side, and we were followed by Bhudrinath and a few others mounted on ponies, and some men on foot with their matchlocks.

I could not help laughing at the nuwab's gesticulations and abuse, as he poured it upon the Gónds and shook his sword at them. They would not move, and perched up as they were on the side of a hill, they prepared their bows to give us a volley—and down it came certainly; the arrows whistled past us, and one wounded the nuwab's horse slightly in the neck, at which the Gónds set up a shout of triumph.

"Ah, my poor Motee, thou art wounded," cried he, drawing the arrow from the wound. "Meer Sahib, those rogues will never come down;

you had better give them a volley and disperse them."

"Now, my sons," cried I to my followers, "whenever a fellow raises his body to fire, do you mark him."

They did so. One Gónd in particular, who was sitting on a rock drawing a large bow, which he placed against his feet, was a conspicuous object, and apparently careless of his safety. Surfuraz Khan aimed at him—fired—and in an instant he rolled over and over almost to our feet: the ball had hit him in the throat, and he was quite dead. The rest seeing his fate set up loud yells, and for a moment we thought they would have charged us; however, another of their number fell badly wounded, and carrying him off they rapidly retreated to their mountain fastnesses. Pursuit would have been vain as it was impracticable.

We met with no further adventure during our march, and duly arrived at our stage by the usual hour.

"Amir Ali," said my father, coming to me shortly afterwards, "is the nuwab to be ours or not? If you have invited him as a guest, say so; if not, you had better arrange something."

"A guest!" cried I; "oh, no, he must be disposed of: there can be no difficulty where there are so many good places to destroy him."

"Impossible!" said my father; "on horseback it would be madness. He is a beautiful rider, and his horse is too spirited: the least confusion would make him bound, and who could hold him? We must devise some other plan."

"Leave all to me," said I; "if there is no absolute necessity for selecting a place, I will watch my opportunity."

CHAPTER IX.

Amir Ali Reaches Home.

1—*Villainy afoot.*

"I suppose you have long ere this guessed, my friends," said I to Bhudrinath and Surfuraz Khan, next day, "why the nuwab is in our company?"

"We can have little doubt," replied the former, "since you have brought him so far; but, tell us, what are your wishes,—how is it to be managed? It will be impossible to attack him on the road; he would cut down some of us to a certainty, and I for one have no ambition to be made an end of just at present."

"You are right," said I; "we must not risk anything. Still, I think an opportunity will not long be wanting."

"How?" cried both at the same moment.

"Listen," said I, "and tell me whether my plan meets with your approval. During the march yesterday the nuwab was regretting that we did not fall in with a good stream of clear water, that he might take his usual sherbet: you know that the slave girl he has with him always prepares it. Now I am in hopes that we may meet one in to-morrow's march, and I will try all I can to persuade him to alight and refresh himself; while he is engaged in conversation with me, if we find him off his guard, we can fall on him."

"Nothing is easier," replied Surfuraz Khan; "we cannot fail if he once sits down: his weapons will not then serve him."

We made all our arrangements that night, and next morning started on our journey in high spirits.

The nuwab and I, as usual, rode together at the head of the party.

"This is an unblest country, Meer Sahib," said he, as we rode along. "Didst thou ever see so dreary a jungle, and not a drop of water to moisten the lips of a true believer from one end of the stage to the other? It is well the weather is cool, or we should be sorely tired in our long stages; and here have I, Subzee Khan, gone without my usual sherbet for three days on this very account. I am now as thirsty as a crow in the hot weather, and my mouth opens in spite of me. Oh that we could light on a river or a well in this parched desert! I would have a glorious draught."

"Patience, Khodawund!" cried I, "who knows but we may be near a stream? and then we will make a halt, and refresh ourselves. I am hungry myself, and should not care for an hour's delay to break my fast with some dates I have with me."

"Ha, dates! I will have some too; my fellow may find something to eat in my wallets, and thou sayest truly, the cold wind of these mountains makes one hungry indeed."

But coss after coss was left behind, and as yet no river appeared. I was beginning to think I had received false information, and was in no very good humour at my disappointment when, to my joy, on passing over the brow of a hill, I saw the small river the villagers had spoken of below me.

"There," said I, "Khodawund! There at last is a river, and the sparkling of the water promises it to be good. Your slave can prepare your sherbet"

One by one, as the men arrived, they also rested, or wading into the water refreshed themselves by washing their hands and faces in the pure stream, which glided sparkling over its pebbly bed; the beasts too were allowed to drink, and all the men sitting down in groups, the rude hooka passed round among them, while they cheerfully discussed the merits of the road they had passed, and what was likely to be before them. Casting a hasty

glance around, I saw that all the men were at their posts, three Thugs to each of the nuwab's servants and retainers.

"Fazil Khan, bring my hooka," cried I, as loud as I could. It was the signal we had agreed on.

"Ay," cried the nuwab, "I will beg a whiff or two, 'twill be agreeable with my sherbet."

I had now moved round behind him; my roomal was in my hand, and I signalled to Surfuraz Khan to seize him.

"Look, Nuwab!" cried he; and he laid hold on his right arm with a firm grasp.

"How dare you touch me, slave?" ejaculated Subzee Khan. "How dare you touch a nuwab ——?"

He did not finish the sentence. I had thrown the cloth about his neck, Surfuraz Khan still held his hand, and my father pulled at his legs with all his force. The nuwab snored several times like a man in a deep sleep, but my grip was firm, and did not relax—a horse would have died under it. Suddenly, as he writhed under me every muscle in his body quivered; he snored again still louder, and the now yielding form offered no resistance. I gazed upon his features and saw that the breath of life had passed from the body it had but now animated. Subzee Khan was dead—I had destroyed the slayer of hundreds!

2—*The Home-coming*

I have no more adventures of this expedition to relate to you: we reached our home in due course without any accident or interruption; and who will not say that we enjoyed its quiet sweets, and appreciated them the more after our long absence and the excitement and perils of our journey? I was completely happy, secure in the increasing love and affection of Azeema, whose sweet disposition developed itself more and more every day. I was raised to a high rank among my associates, for what I had achieved was duly related to those who had stayed in our village and to others

who had been out on small expeditions about the country; and the immense booty we had acquired, and my father's well-known determination to retire from active life, pointed me out as a leader of great fortune, and one to whom many would be glad to entrust themselves in any subsequent expedition, as I appeared to be an especial favourite of our patroness.

The return of Hoosein's party, about two months after we had arrived, was an event of great rejoicing to us all when they reached our village. As we had agreed beforehand, at our separation, the whole of the proceeds of the expeditions of both parties were put into one, for general distribution, and on a day appointed it took place. Sahib, you will hardly believe it when I tell you that the whole amounted to very nearly a lakh of rupees.

The reader will perhaps like to know something of the appearance of the man with whom he and I have had these long conversations; and no longer to keep him in the dark on so important a subject, I will describe Amir Ali to him. He is what would be called a short man, about five feet seven inches in height; his figure is now slender, which may be the effect of his long imprisonment,—imprisonment it can hardly he called, except that to one of his formerly free and unrestrained habits and pursuits the smallest restraint must of course be irksome in the highest degree and painful to bear. His age may be about forty or forty-five years; but it sits lightly on him for a native of India, and it has not in the least whitened a beard and mustachios on which he evidently expends great care and pains, and which are always trimmed and curled with the greatest neatness. His figure, as I have said, is slight, but it is in the highest degree compact, agile, and muscular, and his arms are remarkable for the latter quality combined with unusual length and sinewyness. His dress is always scrupulously neat and clean, and put on with more attention to effect than is usual with his brother

approvers, his turban being always tied with a smart cock, and his waist tightly girded with an English shawl or a gaily dyed handkerchief, where once a shawl of Cashmere or a handkerchief of brocade was better suited to his pretensions. In complexion he is fair for an Indian; his face is even now strikingly handsome, and leads me to believe that the accounts of his youthful appearance have not been exaggerated. His forehead is high and broad; his eyes large, sparkling, and very expressive, especially when his eloquence kindles and bursts forth in a torrent of figurative language, which it would be impossible to render into English, or, if it were rendered, would appear to the English reader, unused to such forms of speech, highly exaggerated and absurd; his cheeks are somewhat sunken, but his nose is aquiline and elegantly formed, and his mouth small and beautifully chiselled, and his teeth are exquisitely white and even; his upper lip is graced with a pair of small mustachios, which would be the envy of many a gay lieutenant of hussars; while a beard close and wavy, from which a straggling hair is never suffered to escape, descends nearly to his breast, and hides a throat and neck which would be a study for a painter or a sculptor: to complete all, his chest is very broad and prominent, and well contrasts with the effect of his small waist.

His manner is graceful, bland, and polite,—it is indeed more than gentlemanlike—it is courtly, and I have not seen it equalled even by the Mahomedan noblemen, with many of whom I have associated. Any of my readers who may have been in India, and become acquainted with its nobles and men of rank, will estimate at once how high is the meed of praise on this score which I give to Amir Ali. His language is pure and fluent, perhaps a little affected from his knowledge of Persian, which, though slight, is sufficient to enable him to introduce words and expressions in that language, often when they are not needed, but still it is pure

Oordoo; he prides himself upon it, and holds in supreme contempt those who speak the corrupt patois of the Dukhun, or the still worse one of Hindostan. Altogether Amir Ali is a character, and a man of immense importance in his own opinion and that of every one else; and the swagger which he has now adopted in his gait, but which is evidently foreign to him, does not sit amiss on his now reduced condition.

Reader, if you can embody these descriptions, you have Amir Ali before you; and while you gaze on the picture in your imagination and look on the mild and expressive face you may have fancied, you, as I was, would be the last person to think that he was a professed murderer, and one who in the course of his life has committed upwards of seven hundred murders. I mean by this, that he has been actively and personally engaged in the destruction of that number of human beings.

CHAPTER X.

The Thug Resumes His Story.

1—*Amir Ali is required as Leader.*

I think it is time for me to recommence my tale, for I have still much to relate.

It is of one expedition I would now speak, as it was marked by an extraordinary circumstance, which will show you at once that it is impossible for any one to avoid his fate if it be the will of Alla that he should die.

At the time I speak of I had been obliged to form another set of intimates in consequence of the loss of Bhudrinath and Surfuraz Khan, for both of whom I had the sincerest regard. Hoosein, though I loved and revered him as my father's dearest friend, was now too old and grave to participate in all my thoughts and perhaps wild aspirations for distinction. So, as Peer Khan and Moteeram, with whose names you are familiar, had now risen to my own rank, and proved themselves to be "good men and true" in various expeditions, I took them into my confidence, and we planned an enterprise, of which I was to be the leader and they my subordinates. Fifty of the youngest, stoutest, and most active and enterprising of our acquaintance were fixed on as the band; and all having been previously warned, we met a few days before the Dusera of the year 18—in a grove near our village, which was shady and well adapted for large assemblies, and was always used as a place of meeting and deliberation; it was considered a lucky spot, no unfortunate expedition ever having set out from it.

We were all assembled. It was a lovely morning, and the grass, as yet not even browned by the sun and drought, was as if a soft and beautiful carpet had been spread on purpose for us. The surrounding fields, many of them tilled by our own hands, waved in green luxuriance, and the wind as it passed over them in gentle gusts caused each stalk of tall jowaree to be agitated, while the sun shining brightly made the whole glitter so that it was almost painful to look on for a long time. Birds sang in the lofty banian trees which overshadowed us; hundreds of green parroquets sported and screamed in their branches, as they flew from bough to bough, some in apparent sport, others to feed on the now ripening berries of the trees; and the whole grove resounded with the cooing of innumerable turtle-doves, whose gentle and loving murmurs soothed the turbulence of the heart, and bade it be at peace and rest and as happy as they were.

My father opened the object of the meeting in a short address. He said he was old and no longer fitted for the fatigues and privations of a journey; he recapitulated all I had done on the former expedition, pointed out the various instances in which I had displayed activity, daring, and prudence beyond my years, and concluded by imploring the men to place implicit confidence in me, to obey me in all things as though he himself were present, and above all not to give way to any disposition to quarrel among themselves, which would infallibly lead to the same disastrous results as had overtaken the expedition which had gone out the previous year.

They one and all rose after this address, and by mutual consent swore on the sacred pickaxe to obey me, the most impressive oath they could take, and any deviation from which they all firmly believed would draw down the vengeance of our protectress upon them and lead to their destruction.

I will not occupy your time, sahib, by a narra-

tion of what I myself said; suffice it to say, I proposed that the band should take the high road to the Dukhun, and penetrate as far as Jubbulpoor or Nagpoor; from thence we would take a direction eastward or westward, as hope of booty offered, and so return to our home. Khandesh I mentioned, as being but little known to us Thugs, and where I thought it likely we might meet with good booty, as I had heard that the traders of Bombay were in the habit of sending large quantities of treasure to their correspondents in Malwa for the purchase of opium and other products of that district. I concluded by assuring them that I had a strong presentiment of great success, that I felt confidence in myself, and that if they would only follow me faithfully and truly, we might return in a few months as well laden with spoil as we had on the former occasion.

Our meeting broke up, and I returned to prepare Azeema for my departure. I had invented a tale to excuse my absence. I took an affectionate farewell of her. Many were the charms and amulets she bound about my arms and hung round my neck, which she had purchased from various wandering fakeers and holy moollas; and with streaming eyes she placed my hands upon the heads of my children and bade me bless them. I did so fervently and truly, for I loved them, *sahib*, with a love as intense as were the other passions of my nature.

We rode on, my father and I, and when we arrived at the boundary stone of our village, we dismounted and embraced each other; and I rode on with my men.

2—*A brave resistance.*

According to our rules, no one was to shave or eat *pan* until our first victim fell; and as this was a matter of inconvenience to many of the men, you may be sure we had our eyes in all directions and our scouts well occupied in every village we passed through or halted at. But it was not till

the fifth day that we met with any one who offered a secure and in every way eligible sacrifice. We had fallen in with bands of travellers, some going to and others departing from their homes, but they had invariably women in their company, and them I was determined to spare, as well for my wife's sake as from the injunctions of my father.

However, as I have said, on the fifth day, early in the morning we came to a cross-road, and were glad to see a party of nine travellers, three upon ponies, having the appearance of respectable men, and the rest on foot, coming up the road a short distance from us. To our great joy they struck into the road we were about to take. I soon entered into conversation with the most respectable of their party; and I replied, in answer to his inquiries, that we were soldiers, proceeding, after our leave to Hindostan, to Nagpoor, where we were in service. He told me in return, that he and his brother, one of the two others mounted, with a friend and some attendants, were on a travelling expedition; that they had come from Indoor and were going to Benares, as well for the purchase of cloths and brocades, as to visit that sacred place of Hindoo pilgrimage.

Ho, ho! thought I, these are assuredly men of consequence going in disguise, and I have no doubt are well furnished with ready cash. No time must be lost, as they have come by a cross-road, and have not been seen in our company; there can consequently be no trace by which we could possibly be suspected on their disappearance; so the sooner they are dealt with the better. To this end I lagged behind a little, and imparted my determination to Peer Khan, who rode in the rear of all; by him it was told to another, and thus it circulated throughout the band before we had gone far. I was gratified and delighted to see how, as they became aware of what was to be done, each took his station, three Thugs to each traveller, and the rest disposed themselves round the whole, so as to prevent any possibility of escape.

I remembered the road well, for it was that upon which we had travelled before; and what Thug ever forgets a road? I knew also that, although the country around us was open and bare, there was a river not far off, the sand bed of which was full of the wild cypress, and the bodies could be easily disposed of in the brushwood.

When we arrived at the brink of the river, the man I had continued to converse with begged for a short halt.

"We have been travelling since midnight," said he, "and I for one am well tired, and should be glad of rest."

I made no objection, of course, for it was the very thing I wished; and dismounting, and leading my horse to the water, I allowed him to drink, and then joined the party, which had all collected, and were now seated: the travellers discussing a hasty meal they had brought with them, and the Thugs sitting or standing around them, but all in their proper places.

I called out for some tobacco, the word we had agreed to use, as being least likely to attract attention or inspire suspicion. I had planted myself behind the man I had been speaking to, and as I spoke my handkerchief was thrown. Three years' rest had not affected the sureness of my hold, and he lay a corpse at my feet in an instant. My work was done, and I looked around to see the fate of the rest; one poor wretch alone struggled, but his sufferings were quickly ended, and the party was no more.

"Quick, my lads!" cried I to the lughaees, "quick about your work!" One of them grinned.

"Why," said he, "did you not observe Doolum and four others go away to yon brushwood when we reached this spot? Depend upon it they have the grave ready, or they have been idle."

And it was even so: the grave had been dug while the unsuspecting travellers sat and conversed with us.

We were so busily engaged in stripping the dead, that no one observed the approach of two travellers, who had come upon us unawares. Never shall I forget their horror when they saw our occupation; they were rooted to the spot from extreme terror; they spoke not, but their eyes glared wildly as they gazed now at us and now at the dead.

"Miserable men," said I, approaching them "prepare for death! You have been witnesses of our work, and we have no resource but your destruction for our own preservation."

"*Sahib*," said one of them, collecting his energies, "we are men, and fear not to die, since our hour is come;" and he drew himself up proudly and gazed at me. He was a tall, powerful man, well armed, and I hesitated to attack him.

"I give you one alternative," said I; "become a Thug, and join our band—you shall be well cared for, and you will prosper."

"Never!" he exclaimed; "never shall it be said that Tiluk Singh, the descendant of a noble race of Rajpoots, herded with murderers, and lived on their unblessed gains! No; if I am to die, let it be now! Ye are many; but if one among you is a man, let him step forward, and here on this even sand I will strike one blow for my deliverance;" and he drew his sword, and stood on the defensive.

"I am that man," cried I, though the band with one voice earnestly dissuaded me from the encounter, and declared that he was more than a match for me; "I am that man. Now take your last look on the heavens and the earth, for, by Alla! you never quit this spot!"

"Come on, boasting boy!" he exclaimed; "give me but fairplay, and bid none of your people interfere, and it may not be as you say."

"Hear, all of you;" cried I to them, "meddle not in this matter—'tis mine and mine only. As for the other, deal with him as ye list;" and in an instant more he was numbered with the dead.

"These are your cowardly tricks," cried the

Rajpoot, now advancing on me, for he had stood contemplating the fate of his companion; "my end may follow his; but I shall die the death of a soldier, and not that of a mangy dog as he has done."

I have before told you, sahib, that my skill in the use of every weapon was perfect, thanks to my good instructor; and I had never relaxed in those manly exercises which fit a man for active combat whenever he shall be called into it. My sword was the one Nuwab Subzee Khan had so much admired, and I felt the confidence of a man when he has a trusty weapon in his hand and knows how to wield it.

I have said that the Rajpoot advanced on me. He had no shield, which gave me an immense advantage, but the odds were in his favour from his height and strength; yet these are a poor defence against skill and temper.

He assailed me with all his force and fury; blow after blow I caught on my sword and shield, without striking one myself; he danced round me after the fashion of his people, and now on one leg, now on the other, he made wild gyrations, and at intervals rushed upon me, and literally rained his blows at my person; but I stood fixed to the spot, for I knew how soon this mode of attack must exhaust him, and the loose sand of the river added to his fatigue.

At length he stood still and glared on me, panting for breath. I rushed on him. He was unprepared for my attack, made a feeble and uncertain blow at me, which I caught on my shield and the next instant my sword had buried itself deep in his neck. He fell, and the blood gushed from the wound and from his mouth.

The Rajpoot was not dead: he had sufficient strength remaining to raise himself up on his arm, and he looked at me like a devil. He made many attempts to speak: his lips moved, but no sound followed.

After this proof of my personal courage and skill, I may safely say I was almost adored by the

whole band. They all assured me that a Thug having killed a traveller and a soldier in fair open combat was an unprecedented circumstance, and only required to be known to make me the envy of old and young, and I gloried in what I had done; their praise was sweet incense to my vanity.

The booty we got from the merchant and his brother was rich, and was of itself a fair amount of booty for any expedition. Some were even for turning back, but they were only two or three voices, and weie easily overruled.

"It would be a shame," I said, "if while fortune favoured us we did not take advantage of our good luck."

We continued our march, and reached Saugor.

CHAPTER XI.

Amir Ali joins the Pindharees.

1—*Cheetoo.*

Just at this period it was rumoured through the country that Cheetoo and other Pindharee chiefs of note would assemble their forces after the rains, at the festival of the Dusera, and had planned an expedition of greater magnitude than any ever before undertaken; an expedition which was sure to enrich all its members, and strike terror into the English Government.

Accordingly I set to work to make my preparations. Peer Khan and Motee still remained near us, and when I disclosed my plans to them, they entered into them with great readiness and alacrity. They had enough money to mount themselves well, and after a short absence returned fully equipped for the journey. I had told them to look out for a few really fine fellows to accompany us, whom they brought; but our united means would not allow of our purchasing horses for them, and on foot they would be of no use. In debating on our dilemma, an idea occurred to me that the rajah would perhaps lend or sell the horses on the promise of after and double payment I had heard of such things, and I determined to try what could be done.

To my great joy the rajah consented, and with less difficulty than I had anticipated, for I had become a great favourite with him. I was allowed to take five horses from his stables, which were valued at three hundred rupees each, with their saddles and accoutrements, and this sum was to be doubled in case we returned successful. The rajah

indeed thanked me for the hint I had given him, and many others obtained horses on the same terms, on giving security for the performance of the conditions under which they took them.

In due time we arrived at Nemawur, the residence of Cheetoo. Here were collected men from every part of Hindostan, as various in their tribes as they were in their dresses, arms, and accoutrements. The country round Nemawur was full of them, and the town itself appeared a moving mass of human beings, attracted by the hope of active service, and above all of plunder. We lost no time in presenting ourselves at the durbar of the chief, and were graciously received by him.

Cheetoo was a fine-looking man, and a gallant leader. He ought to have died on the field of battle, instead of in the miserable manner he did. No man that ever led a lubhur was juster in the division of plunder; no one was ever more attentive to the wants and complaints of those under him than was Cheetoo Pindharee. It was this which gained him so many followers, while his personal activity and hardihood stimulated his soldiers to exertion and emulation. Nothing could tire him; often have I seen him after a long and weary march, when it was as much as most of us could do to sit on our horses, dash out to the front and exercise his noble steed, which bore him gallantly, as though he were only returning from a morning's ride of a few miles.

Cheetoo was, as I said, struck with my appearance, as I introduced myself as a poor Syud of Jhalone, desirous of serving under him in his ensuing campaign.

"Oh," said he, "from Jhalone! you have travelled far, my friend; but nevertheless you are welcome, as every brave cavalier is who brings a good horse and a willing heart to the service of Cheetoo. You know my conditions of service: I give no pay, but as much plunder as your own activity can procure; the people will tell you what

my share of it is; and I look to your honesty, for your face belies you if you are a rogue."

"I know the conditions," said I, "and will accept them; but I have brought a few friends with me who are desirous of sharing my fortunes, and, if it be the pleasure of the huzoor, I will bring them."

"Surely," he replied; "but now I am engaged; meet me with your men at the place of assembly in the evening, and I will see them and your horses, for the station I shall allot you in the durra depends on their fitness."

I made my obeisance and retired. I had made the acquaintance of one of Cheetoo's sirdars, a man by name Ghuffoor Khan, a perfect savage in appearance and deportment, a fellow who had Pindharee written on his face, and had served with much distinction in the durras of Dost Mahomed and Kureem Khan. He had introduced me to Cheetoo, and now, as he accompanied me from the durbar, he gave me instructions how I was to proceed.

"You will meet us," he said, "on the plain beyond the town, and see that all your horses look well, that your men are well dressed and armed, and I will venture to declare you are all placed in my division, which has the honour of leading, and is the first for fighting and for plunder. I shall be glad to have you, and I will try whether I cannot get you the command of a hundred or two of my own risala. We want leaders, and from your appearance I judge that you will do justice to my patronage."

Long before sunset Cheetoo issued from the town, accompanied by as gallant a company as could well be imagined. The leaders of the different durras were all around him, each surpassing the other in the richness and martial air of his dress, his arms, and the trappings of his horse. Before him, making his horse leap and bound in a wonderful manner, rode Ghuffoor Khan, clad in chain-armour, which glittered in the red rays

of the setting sun. No one equalled him in appearance, though many were noble-looking cavaliers; and no one appeared to manage his steed with the ease and grace that he did.

"That is the man!" I cried with enthusiasm to Peer Khan; "that is the man we are to serve under; is he not a gallant fellow? Now follow me." And I gave my impatient horse the rein, and dashing onwards was in an instant at the side of Cheetoo.

Cheetoo checked his horse, and for a moment surveyed me with delight. "You are a fine young fellow," he said at length.

"What say you, Ghuffoor Khan, will the Meer Sahib serve with you? and have you a few hundred men to put under him?"

"May I be your sacrifice!" cried the khan, "'tis the very thing your servant would have proposed. I liked the Meer Sahib from the moment I saw him."

"Then be it so," said Cheetoo; "take him with you, and see that you treat him kindly."

"Come," cried the khan to me, "come then, Meer Sahib, take a tilting-spear from one of those fellows; here is a rare piece of ground, and I must see whether you are master of your weapon."

"I fear not," said I; "I know little about the spear. On foot and with the sword I should not fear the best man of the army; nevertheless, to please you I will try."

I took the spear, a long light bamboo, with a large stuffed ball of cotton at the end of it, from which depended a number of small streamers of red cloth, and following Ghuffoor Khan, dashed forwards into the plain.

We pursued each other alternately, now advancing to the attack, now retreating, amidst the plaudits of the assembled horsemen, who looked on with curiosity to see how an utter stranger would behave against the most accomplished cavalier of the army. For a long time neither of us had any advantage over the other; our horses were admir-

ably trained, and neither allowed the other to approach within reach of the spear-thrust. This was the great nicety of the tilt, and cries of "Shabash! Shabash!" resounded at every baffling turn or successful escape from a meditated blow. At last the khan touched me; it was but a graze, which I received on my arm, having delayed for an instant to turn my horse, and he cried out that he had won.

"I own it," said I, as our horses stood panting for breath, "for I am, as you know, a novice at the use of the weapon; yet if you will give me another trial, I will again cross spears with you, and see if I have not better luck."

"Good," cried he, laughing; "but look out, for I warn you I shall not be merciful; a sharp blow on the ribs of a young hand teaches him to be careful ever after."

"Come on," cried I; "if I can I will return the compliment."

We again took a large circle, and at a good canter approached each other till we were nearly within spear's length. The Khan was as good as his word, and made several desperate lunges at me. I avoided them, however, by the quickness of my horse, and I plainly saw that he could by no endeavour approach near enough to me to strike a decisive blow. His horse, too, being fatter, was more blown than my own; and after allowing him to weary it still more for some time in a vain pursuit of me, I suddenly changed my position and became his assailant. I believe I was more cool and wary than he was, for he appeared vexed that a stranger should be on such equal terms with him at his favourite exercise; he did not parry my lunges with the same precision as in the first encounter, when, notwithstanding all my efforts to touch him, he avoided and laughed at me. Still I had not touched him; and growing weary of my close pursuit, he endeavoured to turn again and become the assailant; but whether his horse was slow in wheeling round, or whether I

was too near to allow of his avoiding the blow, I know not; but as he endeavoured to cross behind me, I wheeled my horse suddenly, struck my heels into his sides, and as he gave his accustomed bound of some yards, struck my spear full on the broad chest of the khan, who was somewhat stunned by the blow. A loud shout from those around us proclaimed my victory; and the khan himself, though abashed at his defeat, was one of the loudest in my praises to the chief himself.

"Now," said he, "thou art no stranger at this work, Meer Sahib; thou hast played me a trick."

"I have not Khan," I cried; "it was the result of chance. Two days ago I had never had a spear in my hand. I only observed what you did when you hit me, and to my good horse I owe my fortune. But it was all chance, and though I prize the victory, yet I regret that such a chance should have hurt you."

"Nay, I am not hurt, Syud," he replied, "and I bear these things with good humour; but if you are as good a hand with the sword as you promise to be with the spear, there will not be a man in the camp to stand before you."

"It would be boastful in me to challenge any one," said I, "seeing that I am a stranger among you; yet if the noble Cheetoo wishes to try me, I will essay what I can do to-morrow."

"Good, good!" cried all; and Cheetoo himself, vastly pleased with the result of my encounter with Ghuffoor Khan, bade me present myself early at his residence, where he would invite a few good swordsmen to attend and see us exercise.

2.—*A Soldier's Exercise.*

The next afternoon we were all assembled on a small plain outside the town; Cheetoo had spread his carpet after the manner of a Pindharee, and sat with his chiefs around him, promising by his demeanour to be an eager spectator of the encounter.

He was remarkably civil to me, and asked me to sit by him until a few men, who were ready, had displayed their dexterity and prowess. On the signal being given by him, two stout Rajpoots leaped into the circle and clattered their sticks on each other's shields for some time without either touching the other.

"Does this please you?" said Cheetoo to me. "Those fellows are good hands, you see, at their weapons: neither would have drawn blood had they had swords in their hands."

"They are expert enough," said I, "but methinks they have played together before and know each other's ways; they make a great show, but if I may be pardoned, I think neither has much real skill. If my lord wishes, I will try either of them."

"Take care you are not over-matched," said he; "I would not have your fair fame sullied. You have already interested me much in your behalf."

"Do not fear for me," said I; "I will do my best."

I stripped myself to my trousers, and girding a handkerchief tightly about my waist, I stepped into the circle, where one of the men, who had now rested from his first encounter, awaited me. I took a stick and a small shield made of basket-work from Peer Khan, who had brought them, and advanced to the centre. There were murmurs among the assembly that I was over-matched, for they contrasted my slight form with the tall and brawny one of my antagonist; but I was not to be deterred by this. I knew my skill, and that mere personal strength would avail but little against it.

"How is it to be?" said I to the Rajpoot. "Does the first fair blow decide between us?"

"Certainly," he replied. "I shall strike hard, so be on your guard."

"Good," said I: "now take your post."

He did. He retired to one edge of the circle and advanced on me leisurely, now stooping and leaning his shield-arm on his knee as he rested a moment to survey me, and now circling round me,

first rising on one leg and then on the other, and waving his stick in the air.

I stood perfectly still and in a careless attitude, but well on my guard, for I knew that I should hazard something in moving after him. It was evident to me that he did not expect this, for he seemed for a moment irresolute, but at last he rushed on me with two or three bounds, and aimed a blow at my head. I was perfectly prepared, for I knew his mode of attack; I received the blow on my shield, caught the stick under it, and rained such a shower of blows on his undefended person as completely astonished him.

The assembly rang with plaudits, and the other Rajpoot stepped forward and saluted me.

"You have had but short work with my friend Bheem Singh," said he; "but now you must try me."

"I am ready," I replied; "so get to your post."

I had now an antagonist worthy of me. He knew my system of play, and verily I thought myself for the moment engaged with my old instructor; but I had used to vanquish him, and I did not fear the man before me. We were soon hotly engaged: he was as cool and wary as myself, and after a long conflict, in which neither had the advantage, we rested awhile, both out of breath.

"Enough, enough!" cried Cheetoo; "you have both done bravely; neither has won, and you had better let the matter stand as it is."

"Not so, Khodawund," said I; "let us finish it. One of us must win, and my friend here desires as much as myself to see which of us is the better man. Is it not so?"

"Ay," said the fellow laughingly, "the Nuwab Sahib knows that no one as yet has overcome me; but I have fairly met my match, and whoever taught you was a good master, and has had a disciple worthy of him."

"As you will," said Cheetoo, "only play in good humour; let no feud grow out of it."

We both saluted him, and assured him we could

not quarrel, and that whoever was victor must entertain a high respect for his opponent.

And to it we set again, as we had now recovered our breath. Victory for a long time hovered between us, now inclining to the one and now to the other; we had both lost our footing once or twice, and the spectators would have had us leave off, but excited as we were it was impossible—we stopped not for their exclamations. I was put to my last shifts to avoid the well-directed blows of the Rajpoot; he had better wind than I, and this obliged me to alter my mode of play: hitherto I had attacked him; I now only warded off his cuts, but watched my opportunity. In his eagerness, thinking by a succession of blows he could beat down my guard, he exposed his side, and my stick descended on his ribs with a sound which was heard by all, and with a force which fairly took away his breath; had my weapon been a sword, I think I should have cut him in two.

"Fairly won!" cried Cheetoo: "fairly and bravely won! Ramdeen Singh, thou hast lost, but it is no disgrace to thee. Come to me by-and-by, and I will reward thee."

The Rajpoot laughed, and I was glad he bore the defeat so good-humouredly, for I had expected the contrary; he allowed that he had been vanquished, and cried out to all that it had been a fair encounter, and that he had used the utmost of his skill: "So beware," he continued, "how any of you engage the Meer Sahib; you all know what I am, and I have been fairly beaten."

I was delighted with the noble fellow, and addressed Cheetoo himself.

"I crave a boon, Khodawund, and if I may hope to have it granted, I will speak."

"Say on," he replied; "I will grant it readily."

"Then," said I, "let this brave fellow be placed under me. By your favour, a stranger has been entrusted with the command of part of the harawul (advance-guard), and I would have both these Raj-

poots with me, and be allowed to entrust fifty men to the one and twenty-five to the other."

"Good," said Cheetoo, "let it be so; and do you, Ghuffoor Khan, look to it that it is done; these are the men who will serve us best in the time of need."

3—*The Campaign.*

A few days more I was fairly installed into my new charge. Fortune had favoured me far above my expectations, and I saw naught before me but a career of distinction under my new master. True, I was no longer a leader on my own responsibility, but the rank I held was honourable, and perhaps far above my deserts. I seized an opportunity which presented itself, and wrote a full account of the whole to my father and Azeema, for I knew that they would rejoice at tidings so new and unexpected.

Our time passed in the camp in the manner I have related. In the mornings I was a constant attendant upon Cheetoo, who rarely allowed me to leave his person during his inspections of the constantly arriving new adventurers; and the evenings closed with feats of strength and trials of skill, in which I sustained the reputation I had begun with. I never spent a happier time than the month I was at Nemawur, in every way so gratifying to me, and so consonant to my previously formed wishes.

At last the festival of the Dusera arrived, and it was held with great pomp and show. A grand review of all the assembled adventurers was held, a muster taken, and it was reported that five thousand good horsemen were present; and this number, with their followers, and with those indifferently mounted, was augmented to nearly eight thousand—a gallant band, ready to do the bidding of their chief, and to carry war and devastation into the countries before them.

It was planned that we should separate into two

bodies soon after passing the *Nurbudda*, penetrate as far as the Kistna river to the south, and, should we find that fordable, then press on as far south as we could, without exposing ourselves to encounters with the regular armies of the Feringhees, which we were assured, although at present inactive, could speedily be sent in pursuit of us. Accordingly, as the morning broke, the whole camp was in motion; and a noble sight it was to see durra after durra defile before their chief, and hurry onwards at a rapid pace. Boats had been provided at the *Nurbudda*, which we crossed the same day, and took up our ground near the town of Hindia on its southern bank.

At this point the army separated. I remained with my division and Cheetoo, and we pushed on the day after, taking a direction to the westward, so as to come upon the river Taptee, up the valley of which we were to proceed till we should reach the territories of the rajah of Nagpoor, with whom a treaty had been previously made to allow us a free and unmolested passage through his dominions, on the condition that they were not to be plundered. The other division, under Syud Bheekoo, a leader of note and only second to Cheetoo, took a direction to the eastward, along the bank of the *Nurbudda*, until they reached the grand road to Nagpoor, by which it was their intention to travel.

Meanwhile we proceeded by rapid marches; for we were eager to reach the scene of our operations, as our money was running short, and without plunder we should starve. We heard that there was a small detachment of regular troops under Major Fraser watching our movements; but our spies told us they were few in number, and we were under no apprehension of an attack from them: it was reported that they did not exceed three hundred men, and we vainly thought they would not dare to face as many thousands. But we had not sufficiently estimated their bravery. We knew they were upwards of fifteen coss distant

from us, and what infantry could make that march and attack a body of horse like ours?

They did, however, attack us. We had arrived at our ground near a village on the Taptee, and some were cooking their morning meal, others lounging idly about the camp or lying at full length on their saddle-cloths, when the alarm was given that the Feringhees were upon us. The scene of confusion which ensued is indescribable. Men hurried hither and thither; anything like organization was past all hope; each, as he could gain his horse, threw himself upon it and fled for his life: not a man stood. In vain I entreated those with me to rally, and make a charge on the small body of red-coats which was now drawn up in line close to our camp, and was pouring volley after volley amongst us with destructive precision. Not a man would hear me; and though my own Thugs and a few of my division swore they would die if I were to lead them on, I saw no chance of success; and as one or two of my men had fallen near me, we too at length turned our horses' heads and fled. We were not pursued, though there were some horsemen with the infantry, who, had they not been the most arrant cowards, would have charged after and engaged us.

I must say I longed that they should, and I kept my men, nearly a hundred, in a close body, while from time to time we faced about and shook our spears in defiance at the body of horse, about our own number, who, however, did not stir. We saw the infantry once more put in motion, take possession of our camp, which, with the thousands of temporary screens from the sun standing here and there, and the fires burning under half-cooked victuals, must have been a welcome resting-place to them after their long march. They must have gained a considerable booty, for many a man threw himself on the bare back of his horse, leaving a well-lined saddle behind him to the victors.

Our surprise and rout was complete; and if the enemy had had a larger body of infantry, or any

good cavalry with them to have followed us, we might have bidden adieu to all hopes of future plunder, and most likely should have taken our way to our respective homes and abandoned the expedition. As it was, however, we found we had not lost more than a hundred men, and three days afterwards we were again reunited, and in as good spirits as ever.

At length we debouched by almost untrodden paths from the hills to the eastward of Ellichpoor. We entered the territories of the Nizam near the river Wurda, which we crossed, and in one march of nearly twenty-five coss reached Oomraotee, which it appeared had been the object of our leader from the first. I have once before described its riches and prosperity, and it was then far richer than it is now.

As we rushed along, more like the flood of a mighty river than aught else, every village on our route was instantly deserted by its inhabitants and left to our mercy. They were one by one ransacked for treasure, and in some of the largest much booty was obtained. I was fortunate in leading the advance-guard on this day, and well do I remember the excitement of the moment, as we passed the last defile in the hills, and rushed in a body into the plain. Well do I remember waving my sword to my companions,—whose numbers were now swelled to nearly five hundred splendid fellows, often increased by parties from the rear,—as I showed them the broad plains of Berar, and told them that we had unlimited power to plunder as we listed!

Ghuffoor Khan envied me that day; he had been detained with Cheetoo, who remained with the main body, while my own harawul was increased, in order that I might advance and surround Oomraotee. On we dashed! The few villages we surprised were quickly laid under contribution; and rupees and gold and silver ornaments were tendered, almost without our asking, by their terrified inhabitants. As we proceeded, the news that

we were coming had spread through every village, and thousands of the people were seen flying from their homes; while a few only remained in each, with an offering to me, accompanied by entreaties not to burn their villages. Nor did I; though from the pillars of smoke which not long afterwards arose in every direction behind us, I too justly thought the main body had been less merciful than we had. We reached Oomraotee towards evening. There were but few soldiers to guard this important post, and they fled on the news of our approach; we therefore entered the town unchecked and unopposed. How different was my present from my former visit!

4—*Plunder.*

I directed my course to the main street, where I knew I should find the principal sahoukars; and, after stationing parties of my men at each end and at the different outlets, I rode into the middle of the chouke, or market-place, and dismounted among the leading men of the town, who had a carpet spread, and were prepared, as they said, to do us honour.

But few words of greeting passed, for ours was no cordial visit, and each party was bent on driving the hardest bargain.

"Come, gentlemen," said I, after I had listened for some time to their vain protestations of poverty and inability to raise a sum adequate to my desires, "this is mere fooling. You have offered a lakh of rupees; do you think the noble Cheetoo will be satisfied with this? Many a fine village behind me has not now a roof or tree standing, and your good town will assuredly share the same fate if you trifle with us; and not only will it be burned, but your property will be handed over to the tender mercies of my men—ay, and your wives and daughters also; so I give you fair warning. You have no force to oppose us; and if you refuse, I am desired to tell you that we shall stay here for some days and amuse ourselves by inspecting the

interior of your houses. Go, therefore, be wise, consult among yourselves, and before the shadow of this tree has lengthened the measure of my sword (and I laid it on the ground), bring me an answer worthy of your name for wisdom, and liberal withal; beyond that time I give you not a moment.

Eagerly I watched the increasing shadow, as from time to time I called to them that the period allowed had nearly elapsed; at last the bright hilt of my sword glittered no longer, and I took it up amidst a shout from my men. The merchants saw my action, and again advanced in a body towards me.

"Sit down, Meer Sahib," said the fattest of them, who appeared to be the chief, "sit down; let us talk over this matter calmly and deliberately. That business is always unsatisfactory which is done in a hurry and with heated minds."

"No!" I exclaimed, "I will not: standing as I am, I will hear what you have to say. Remember, when I draw my sword the plunder begins, and though I have some influence over these brave fellows while they expect a reasonable offer from you, yet the instant they are disappointed my power ends, and I will not answer for any of your lives."

"Come aside with me for a moment," said the chief merchant; "I would speak with you apart: you need fear no treachery from a sahoukar!"

We all laughed heartily. "No, no," said I, "I fear naught, and will come. And do you, my good fellows," I added, turning to my men, "see that none of these worthy persons escape."

"Well," said I, when we had gone a few paces from the group, "what would you say? Be quick: my men are impatient, and your houses and shops are provokingly and temptingly near."

"Listen then," replied he: "you are a leader and by your conduct doubtless have the influence you appear to have. You have not more than five hundred men with you; we offer you, therefore,

ten thousand rupees as your own share, one thousand to each of your sirdars, and one hundred apiece to your men; this will be nearly a lakh of rupees, and we will take our chance with the main body. What do you say? be quick and tell me, for the money is at hand, and can be easily distributed before the main body comes up."

I pondered awhile; I knew Cheetoo would make his own terms, and I did not see any harm in getting as much as I could of the spoil before he came. I knew also that he expected ten lakhs, and would get it, or nearly the sum, by fair means or foul. "Listen again," said the sahoukar; you are in advance, you have naught to do but take your money and push on, and any village before you will shelter you for the night; what will Cheetoo know of it?"

'Nay," said I, "here we remain; after a march of twenty-five coss, we are in no humour to proceed. But I will take my men outside the town on the instant payment of one lakh of rupees; remember, one third of what we get goes to the chief, and our share after all is not much."

'Agreed," said he; "now come to your men, and persuade them to be quiet; they will not get so much by violence as by treating us well."

We returned to the group we had left, and I unfolded to them the proposition which had been made to me; it was welcomed with a loud shout which made the air ring, and was then succeeded by loud cries for the money.

The sum had evidently been collected previously for in a few moments a line of men, heavily laden with bags of rupees, issued from a lane close to where we were sitting. Duffa by duffa of the Pindharees, each headed by its own duffadar, was brought up to the spot; each man received his hundred rupees, each leader his thousand, which were stowed away in the capacious bags of their saddles.

One by one the Pindharees left me, except a few

who stayed by my desire; and our business at an end, I sat down and awaited Cheetoo's arrival.

"What do you think he will ask?" said my fat friend to me.

"I know not," I answered; "but you had better be liberal at once, or he will sack your town, and you know what Pindharees are; they have few scruples, and some of you may be tortured."

"Say at once, Meer Sahib," said another of the merchants who had not yet spoken, "say what we should offer, and how many Pindharees are there? We have heard there are five thousand."

"Somewhat below the mark, Sethjee," said I; "we are little under ten thousand, I think. However, you will see the lubhur, and judge for yourselves. As for the sum, I should say, in the first place, a lakh of rupees for Cheetoo himself—I know he expects as much; then there are three sirdars, Heeroo, Ghuffoor Khan, and Rajun—fifty thousand apiece; then each minor leader and duffadar a thousand, and every good Pindharee a hundred. Say, have I spoken well?"

"Bhugwan protect us!" cried one and all, "we are ruined and dead men. Why this would be at least eight lakhs of rupees; where are we to get such a sum? We are ruined and better kill us at once."

"No, no, my good friends, not so," said I. "All the world knows that Oomraotee is the richest town in the country, ay, richer than Hyderabad itself, and that the money may be counted, not by lakhs, but by crores; so talk not to Cheetoo of your poverty, for he will presently prove whether you lie or not."

"I tell you all," said the fat sahoukar, "the worthy Meer Sahib speaks the truth. Bhugwan has sent this gurdee (calamity), and we must be resigned to our fate."

"Good!" cried I; "now you speak like wise men, and I will give you further advice. Cheetoo is a great man, and loves to be paid honour, as indeed is due to him; so also do the other leaders.

Now get you *pan*, *uttur*, and spices, make up a proper tray of them, bring a few handsome shawls, and as he takes his seat, one of you throw a pair of the best over his shoulders and those of the other chiefs, and lay your nuzzurs before him as you would before Sikundur Jah himself; Inshalla! you will find favour in his sight, and where you would have to pay ten lakhs you will get off with half the sum, and save your town besides."

The assembly drank in my words, as I by turns advised and alarmed them, in order to keep up the spirit I had infused; and in this manner the time passed until the dusk of evening, when, by the noise of the tread of many horses' feet and the firing of match-locks, we were assured of the approach of the main body.

Cheetoo came, and riding into the chouke, surrounded by a crowd of wild-looking figures, the effect of whose appearance was materially increased by the dusk of the evening, his titles were screamed out by a dozen mouths, each vying with the other in exaggeration of his powers.

The group of sahoukars, headed by me, advanced towards him; and the head merchant, rubbing his forehead on the chief's stirrup, implored him to alight and refresh himself, adding that a zeafut had been prepared, and all were desirous of presenting their nuzzurs.

He alighted, and led by the hand by the chief merchant, he was conducted into an adjoining house, which belonged to one of the merchants, and where a clean white floor-cloth had been spread, and a musnud placed. The room too was well lighted. Cheetoo took his seat, and looked around him with evident gratification; savage as his countenance was, it now wore a smile of triumph, yet mixed with an expression of extreme pleasure.

"These are civilised people," said he to Rajun, his favourite, who was close to him, "I little expected this: did you?"

"Khodawund!" I said, "the terror of your

name has preceded you"—and he smiled grimly, —"and your appearance is in every way so imposing and surpassing the accounts these men have heard, that they are dumb; and though they would fain lay a nuzzur at your feet, in every way befitting your high rank, they have not words to express their desires, and have begged your slave to inform my lord of them."

'Kubool, Kubool! I agree," cried Cheetoo; "let the trays be brought. Verily a nuzzur from the sahoukars of Oomraotee ought to be worth seeing."

Fifteen trays were brought in, covered with rich velvet coverings, and set down before the musnud; one by one their covers were removed, and indeed it was a goodly sight! Dates, pistachio nuts, sweetmeats, and sugar-candy filled four; the rest contained cloths of various kinds, European and Indian, muslins, chintzes, rich turbans, and Benares brocades. It was a nuzzur fit for a prince, and Cheetoo was delighted.

"Now," said I to the sahoukar, "this is a happy moment; where are the shawls and the ashruffees? Have a stout heart, and throw the shawls over him, as you would over one of your own tribe at a marriage."

The sahoukar took the shawls from an attendant, and putting five ashruffees upon them, advanced to the feet of Cheetoo; and having made the tusleemat, or three obeisances, he presented the gold, and unfolding the shawls, which were very splendid, dexterously enveloped the chief's person in them, and then retreating, stood with his hands folded on his breast in an attitude of respectful humility.

CHAPTER XII.

PINDHAREE WARFARE.

1—*Cheetoo does Business.*

Cheetoo was evidently flattered by the distinction with which he had been received, and as he examined the beautiful shawls which now enveloped his person, a grim smile of delight lighted up his coarse features.

"Let the room be cleared," cried Cheetoo; "we have business with these worthy gentlemen, which I have sworn to do before we touch any refreshment."

It was quickly done, and there only remained our leaders and the sahoukars, who huddled together like wild fowl on the approach of a hawk.

"Come forward," said Cheetoo to them; "come and sit near us; we would speak to you."

They all arose, and, as they were directed, seated themselves in respectful attitudes on the edge of the musnud.

"Now," continued Cheetoo, "you are doubtless aware of our object. We want money; and money we will have, by fair means or foul. If ye are wise, ye will pay me handsomely to be rid of me and my people, who are savage fellows. I desire not to harm you and on your own heads be it, if any disaster befalls you. Say, therefore, how much are ye prepared to give?"

"Truly," said the sahoukar, my friend, who was the spokesman, "we have been duly advised of your Highness's coming; and as a proof that we did not dread you, you see us here, and we have done our poor ability to welcome so distinguish-

ed a person. We have also received good counsel from your servant the Meer Sahib; and agreeably to his instructions we have drawn up a list of a few trifles and some ready money which we are desirous of laying at the feet of your Highness." And the sahoukar handed to him a paper written in Persian.

"This is unintelligible to me, for I am no moonshee; but can any of you read, brothers?" asked Cheetoo of the other leaders.

"Not a word, not a letter," cried one and all; "none of us know one letter from another."

"I can send for a moonshee," said the sahoukar; "one is in attendance."

"If I am permitted," said I, "I will read the list: I may be able to make it out."

"Ha! thou art a clerk as well as a good soldier," cried Cheetoo, laughing. "Well, take the paper, and let us hear our good fortune."

"First then," said I, after I had glanced over the document, "this paper sets forth, that the sahoukars and others of the market-town of Oomraotee, in council assembled, having heard of the near approach of the mighty Cheetoo and his army, and being desirous of approaching his feet with a small tribute of respect, have put down the following articles and sums of ready money, which are prepared and ready for his acceptance, —on no condition save that they may find favour in his sight, and be the humble means of insuring his clemency to others."

"Good!" said Cheetoo. "Now get thee to the marrow of the matter as speedily as may be, for my stomach craves food, and I doubt not these worthy gentlemen's families have prepared a repast for me."

"It is ready, noble Cheetoo," cried the sahoukar; "and if the order is given, it will be set out; but the food of us poor Hindoos would be tasteless to my lord, and therefore we have had the repast cooked by the best bawurchees of the town."

"Silence!" cried the chief; "speak when you

are allowed to do so: we are in no humour to be interrupted."

The sahoukar shrank back intimidated, and raising my voice, I proceeded.

"The first time, Protector of the Poor!" cried I, "fifty thousand rupees for yourself."

"Is that all?" cried he, his brow contracting.

"Stay," said I; "more follows. 'A tray of choice jewels, gold, and silver, valued at fifteen thousand rupees, and three trays of shawls and brocades for my lord's muhal, valued at ten thousand rupees: in all, seventy-five thousand rupees. Secondly, a sum of ten thousand rupees to each leader of rank, of whom we learn from the worthy syud, Ameer Ali, there are three; a tray of jewels to each, of five thousand rupees, and three trays, each valued at five thousand more: in all, twenty thousand rupees each."

"Go on!" cried Cheetoo; "you have not done yet, I suppose?"

"No," said I, glancing down the paper; "there is more following. 'Thirdly, a sum of one thousand rupees to each duffadar; we are uninformed of their number, but we have supposed thirty.'"

"Good!" cried Cheetoo; "what more?"

"'Fourthly, the sum of fifty rupees to each deserving person, to be given at the discretion of the mighty Cheetoo; by report we hear there are four thousand. Also food, grain, and forage for as many days as the army may remain with us.' This is all," said I; "what are my lord's orders?"

"The list is well enough," said Cheetoo; "but they are wrong in some particulars: first, there are fifty duffadars, are there not, Ghuffoor Khan?"

"There are," he replied; "I told them off myself."

"Put that down, Meer Sahib," said Cheetoo. "Again there are five thousand good Pindharees; am I not right?"

"True again," cried all the leaders; "were they not counted at Nemawur?"

This was a lie; there were hardly four thousand,

for nearly half the lubhur had gone off in a different direction from the *Nurbudda;* but it signified little, for Cheetoo, I knew, was determined to make the best terms he could with the sahoukars.

"Put down five thousand," said Cheetoo; "and now see how much you have got."

I hastily arranged the amount, and read the paper to him.

"First," said I, "there is your Highness's share, seventy-five thousand rupees; secondly, on account of the leaders, sixty thousand rupees; then the fifty duffadars, each man a thousand, fifty thousand rupees; lastly, five thousand men, each forty, two hundred thousand. And the sum of the whole is three lakhs and eighty-five thousand rupees."

"And," said Cheetoo to Ghuffoor Khan, "the horses' shoes must be worn out, I think? We require new ones."

"Certainly," cried the Khan, with a merry grin.

"Put down fifteen thousand rupees for the horse-shoes: this, Meer Sahib, will make the sum an even four lakhs; and, gentlemen," continued he to the sahoukars, "I must trouble you to pay with as little delay as possible, or we must help ourselves."

There was a hurried conference for a few moments among the sahoukars, and a few angry words passed among them; but they were wise: my fat friend rose, and making a lowly obeisance, declared the money was at hand, and should be brought immediately.

"Good!" cried Cheetoo; "now let me have my dinner, and do you all see that the duffadars are present at this house by to-morrow's dawn, to receive their shares and those of their men. The lubhur must move on, for after this kind reception, I would not have my friends the sahoukars exposed to the chance of being plundered by my lawless bands."

2—*A New Expedition.*

In little more than three months we had traversed the richest part of the broad territory of the Nizam; we had eluded his troops and those of the Feringhees, and laughed at their beards; we had plundered his richest towns with impunity; and we had returned, with scarcely the loss of a man, laden with plunder of enormous value. So rich was it, that the sahoukars of Nemawur, after purchasing all they could from us, were unable to find further funds to buy up the whole; and merchants from Oojein, and Indoor, and all the neighbouring large cities, were sent for to our rich market.

In due time all had been purchased, and every man prepared to return as quickly as he could to his home, with the proceeds of his booty. I need not say how my heart bounded at the prospect of again seeing mine, and laying at my Azeema's feet the wealth I had acquired, nor the pleasure she would experience in hearing me recount the wild adventures I had gone through. I accordingly purchased all the gold I could, as also did my men, and hiring two swift camels, I loaded them with it and the valuable cloths we had received for our own use, and was ready for a rapid march to Jhalone when I could receive my dismissal from Cheetoo's durbar. This it was not an easy matter to attain, for I had served the chief faithfully, he had confidence in my address and activity, and was loath to part with me, fearing I would not return to his standard.

The day I went to take leave he would not receive my parting gift, nor give me the usual ceremonial return of *uttur* and *pan* on my departure; and I sat in the durbar in gloomy thought, that perhaps treachery was intended towards me—a poor return for my exertions. But I was wrong: he called me towards him when but few remained, and appointing a late hour in the night for an interview and private conversation, desired me to

be punctual, for that he had matters of importance to reveal to me.

I returned to my abode in better hope, yet still suspecting, and almost inclined to follow the advice of Peer Khan and the rest, who would fain have had me fly, as the only means of preserving our money. I did not however entirely mistrust Cheetoo; but I determined, if he put me off with further words, and caused me more delay, that I would at once leave him in the best way I could.

I accordingly attended at the hour appointed, which was past midnight. I found the chief alone. I had never before been so honoured as to be admitted to an entirely private conference, though I had been allowed a seat in his councils, and my suggestions had been followed on more than one occasion. I could not divine what was to ensue.

"Be seated, Syud," said Cheetoo; "I have much to say to thee."

"Speak on, Nuwab," I replied; "your words are sweet to your servant, and they will fall on ears which will convey their meaning to a heart devoted to your service."

"Listen then," said he. "But first I will ask you what you thought the object of the last expedition to be?"

"Its object!" cried I. "Why, I suppose, only to get as much money as you could for yourself and your men, so as to be ready to take advantage of the war which sooner or later must ensue between the Mahrattas and the Feringhees—may their race be accursed! I never could divine a deeper object, though I have thought upon the subject myself, and heard many opinions expressed by others."

"You are partly right," said he, "but not entirely; now you shall hear the whole, and what my further projects are."

I settled myself into an attitude of profound attention, and drank in his words as he proceeded.

"You have had a watchful eye upon the times, Meer Sahib, and I expected it from you. You

may have heard that Tippoo Sultan—on whose memory be peace!—would fain have enlisted the Nizam and the whole of the Mahrattas in one confederacy to overthrow and extirpate the Feringhees. Had his plans been successful he would have done it; but, a curse on his avarice! he had an underplot to divide the Nizam's territories with the Mahrattas, which was discovered; and a curse on the luck of the Feringhees, who overthrew the only power which, while it lasted, upheld the dignity of the Moslem's faith! Tippoo is gone, and his power. Perhaps you are not aware that at this moment, though Holkar is sorely disabled from what he was, and Sindia has made a base league of passiveness with the Feringhees, a deep confederacy exists among the Mahratta states, and particularly between those of Poona and Nagpoor, to rise simultaneously and declare war against the usurping and never-satisfied Europeans. Sikundar Jah will join with the Feringhees—not that he can do much, for his army is miserable, and his leaders have neither skill nor bravery; but still he will befriend them to the utmost, and his dominions are open to the passage and subsistence of their troops, and in them positions can be taken up which will sorely harass the future operations of the Mahratta leaders. My last expedition was therefore intended (and by the favour of Alla it has succeeded) to impoverish Sikundur Jah's country, to keep the people in a constant state of alarm, and, need I add, to fill our own purses.

"Now listen again. To effect my purpose thoroughly, and to distract the attention of the Europeans from the preparations of the Mahrattas, these expeditions must be rapid in succession to have their due effect. One half of the Huzoor's dominions have been sacked, and the other half remains; Inshalla! it shall share the same fate. The Feringhees will be kept in a perpetual state of alarm; they will follow us vainly from place to place, but I fear them not. I have laughed at their beards once, and will do so again. They shall

know who Cheetoo Pindharee is, and to their cost. Not only shall the cowardly Nizam suffer, but the rich provinces of the Feringhees shall be wasted. I will cross the Krishna; the river will be fordable, or nearly so; and the whole of the provinces which are not overrun by their troops shall be prostrated before my power. This will exhaust their resources and paralyse their efforts. The Mahrattas will then rise to a man. I will join them; for I have been promised a high command in their armies, and territories after their conquest; and we will rise, Meer Sahib—yes, *we*, I say, for these stirring times are the fit ones for such as myself and you—Inshalla! we will take advantage of them, and win fame for ourselves which posterity shall wonder at."

"It is a rare plan," said I, "and a deep one, while the game seems easy to play. I can find no fault with it; but will not the Feringhees be prepared for us, and meet us wherever we show our faces?"

'No!" cried he vehemently, "they will not! cunning as they are, I will be before them in the field. They now think that, glutted with plunder, we shall remain quietly here, and be fools enough to wait for another Dusera before we are again on the move; but they are wrong to a man: and here has lain the cause of my apparent secrecy with you. I could not proclaim it in my durbar that I had planned another expedition; some prating fool would have blabbed of it at his home, and the news would have flown over the country in a week. No; I have kept it secret, except from a few, and they are my chief leaders, every one of whom has a thousand men at his back. Hear me: I am determined, by the favour of Alla, to move hence at the head of a larger army than the last has been, in a space of time under two months. Say, will you come? I will give you the command of a thousand horse, for I love you and depend upon you. Can you return from Jhalone in that time? I have no wish to detain you here: a man's home is dear to

him wherever it is, and you are right to return to it. Yet tell me that you will join me within two months, and what I have promised I will perform."

"I will," cried I; "may your condescension increase, your slave will take advantage of your bounty. In less than two months, though I travel night and day, I will come, and bring more men with me."

"The more the better," said Cheetoo. "Take the best horse from my stable if you wish it, he cannot be in better hands than your own; and as you will want camels, take, too, as many as you require from my own fleet ones. Load them lightly and they will keep up with you. And now go: I am weary in mind and body, and need repose; you, I doubt not, will start with the morning's dawn. Go, and may peace be with you!"

I left him, and joyfully rejoined my associates. I knew the secret was safe with them; and as I unfolded the deep plan to them, they were lost in wonder and admiration at Cheetoo's sagacity and fore-thought. To a man they swore to join me, and to follow my fortunes through good or ill. Merrily we set off the next morning, and quickly miles and miles of road disappeared under the hoofs of our fleet and hardy steeds. In far less time than it had taken us to come, we had reached Jhalone, unlooked-for and unexpected, and with a joyful bound I crossed my own threshold, and was again clasped in the embrace of my Azeema. What words can paint our joy? I cannot describe it; my heart was too full for utterance, as I was again seated in my own zenana, and beheld the frolics and gambols of my beauteous child. My father, too, rejoiced with me; but there was an eye of evil upon us; our cup of joy was fated to be no sooner filled to the brim than to be dashed from our lips. That eye was the rajah's. But more of that hereafter.

As soon as I could, I despatched Peer Khan and Motee with two of the others in various directions to offer terms of employment and the prospect of

booty to as many Thugs as they knew to be good men and good horsemen—the latter was a qualification in which but few Thugs excelled; nevertheless, in the space of ten days they returned with twelve others, some of whom I knew, and all were stated to be resolute men, well acquainted with the use of their weapons. They were easily provided with horses from the rajah's stables, as the first had been, for he had received more than double their value, and would now have risked his whole stud on the same terms. I examined their arms, and rejected such as were defective, supplying them with others. Our saddles were newly stuffed, and every preparation which our experience could suggest was made for even a longer and more arduous enterprise than that from which we had just returned.

I was soon again with Cheetoo, who received me with great joy. I found him busied with the large preparations he was making for his intended expedition. By this time the news of the immense booty he had collected in his first expedition had spread through all lands far and near; thousands had flocked to Nemawur, to offer themselves to his service, in the hope that they might partake in the next; and hundreds were arriving daily, to swell the numbers of the already assembled multitude. A difficult task it was to allot the various tribes and individuals to the command of the different leaders; and my aid was asked by Cheetoo, and as readily given, to organise as far as we could the heterogeneous mass.

Our preparations were now made; upwards of ten thousand good horse were already enrolled, and the number of their followers was beyond computation. How they existed on their own resources I know not, but they did so, and right merrily too, for our camp was one scene of revelry and enjoyment. As a final ceremony, Cheetoo held a general durbar, at which all the chiefs and leaders were present: he disclosed the plan of operations, which was, to penetrate through the territories of

the rajah of Nagpoor to the south-eastward, and passing through the forests and jungles of Gondwana, to pour his forces on the almost unprotected provinces north of Masulipatam; from thence to cross the Krishna, to ravage the country as far as Kurnool, and to return from thence in the best way we could to Nemawur. This plan of operations was received with glad shouts by the assembly, the army outside the tent took them up, and the air was rent with cries of exultation. It was a spirit-stirring moment, all partook of the joy, and the chiefs eagerly besought Cheetoo to lose no time in his departure. Nor did he. Prepared as the whole were to move at a moment's warning, the order was given that the army should cross the *Nurbudda* the next day.

3.—*The Horrors of War.*

We crossed the Krishna, and penetrated nearly as far as Kurpah, where we heard there was more treasure belonging to the English Government. But we were disappointed in this also. The officers who guarded it were on the alert, and the station was guarded by troops; we therefore avoided any collision with them, and directed our course towards Kurnool. Here, also, we were beaten off; but we crossed the river, and again entered the Nizam's territory, closely pursued by a body of English cavalry, who, however, did not cross after us. A consultation was now held, and it was determined that our lubhur should separate into three bodies, both for the sake of destroying and ravaging a larger tract of country than we could do united, and of more easily evading the troops which now watched our movements in every direction. One body therefore took a western course along the banks of the river, another an eastern one, and a third a middle course.

That which took the eastern road was the one with which Cheetoo remained, and with it were Ghuffoor Khan and myself. We were to pass through the country to the eastward of Hyderabad,

and regain the Nagpoor territories by the great north road through Nirmul. I was now the sole companion of Guffoor Khan; so long as the other leaders remained, he was mostly in their company, but now their absence drew us together, and I may almost say that we lived in the same tent, if tent it could be called, which served to shelter us from the excessive heat of the weather. Need I mention that I was a constant witness to his cruelties? They were of every-day's occurrence, and to show you the man's nature, I shall relate one as a specimen of thousands of a similar kind that he committed.

We reached a town, the name of which I forget, nor does it signify now; as usual, it was entered pell-mell by the horde, and the work of destruction commenced. Why should I conceal it? I was as busy as the rest, and not a house or hut of any description escaped my followers and myself. Ghuffoor Khan was busy too. I had completed my work; I had torn ornaments from the females, terrified their husbands and fathers into giving up their small hoards of money; and having got all I could I was preparing to leave the town in company with my Thugs, who never separated from me. We were passing through the main street on our return, when our attention was attracted to a good-looking house, from which issued the most piercing screams of terror and agony.

Before Ghuffoor Khan stood a venerable man, suffering under the torture of having a horse's nose-bag full of hot ashes tied over his mouth, while one of the khan's followers struck him incessantly on the back with the hilt of his sword. The miserable wretch was half choked, and it was beyond his power to have uttered a word in reply to the interrogations which were thundered in his ear by the khan himself as to where his treasure was concealed.

"Perhaps he has naught to give," said I; "at any rate he cannot speak while that bag is over his mouth; let it be removed, and we will hear what he has to say."

"Try it," said the khan; "but we shall make nothing of him, you will see."

"Remove the bag," cried I to the Pindharee who was behind him; "let him speak; and bring some water, his throat is full of ashes."

The bag was removed, and a vessel full of water, which was in a corner of the room, was brought and put to his lips; but he rejected it with loathing, for he was a Hindoo and a Brahmin.

"Hear him!" cried the khan savagely; "he mocks us. Oh the wilful wickedness of age! is it not proverbial? One of you bring some oil and a light; we will see whether this humour can stand my final test, which has never yet failed."

By this time the house was full of Pindharees, and, if I had wished it, I had not dared to interfere further. I stood looking on, determined to let him have his course; he was only hastening his own fate, and why should I prevent it?

The oil was brought, and a quantity of rags were torn from the dhotees or waist-cloths of the murdered men. They were dipped in the oil, and wound round the fingers of the old man to as great a thickness as was possible.

"Now bring a light," cried the khan, "and hold him fast."

A light was kindled, and the man held it in his hand.

'I give you a last chance," said the khan, speaking from between his closed teeth; "you know, I dare say, the use your fingers will be put to. Be quick and answer, or I will make torches of them, and they shall light me to your treasures, which, I warrant, are hidden in some dark hole."

"Do your worst," answered the old man in a desperate tone. "Ye will not kill me; and if my sufferings will in any way gratify you, even let it be so—for Narayun has given me into your power, and it is his will and not yours which does this. You will not hear me cry out, though my arms were burnt off to the sockets. I spit at you."

"Light the rags!" roared Ghuffoor Khan; "this is not to be endured."

They were lit; one by one they blazed up, while his hands were forcibly held down to his sides to accelerate the effect of the fire. It was a sickening sight. The warm flesh of the fingers hissed under the blaze of the oiled rags, which were fed from time to time with fresh oil, as men pour it upon a torch.

The old man had overrated his strength. What nerves could bear such exquisite torture? His shrieks were piteous, and would have melted a heart of stone; but Ghuffoor Khan heeded them not: he stood glutting his savage soul with the sufferings of the wretched creature before him, and asking him from time to time, with the grin of a devil, whether he would disclose his treasures. But the person he addressed was speechless, and after nature was fairly exhausted he sank down in utter insensibility.

I was satisfied. Ghuffoor Khan's cup too was full; for my own determination was made on that spot,—I swore it to myself as I looked at the dead and rushed from the house.

4—*Fate Overtakes a Scoundrel.*

From that hour I made a determination to destroy him. No sooner had I reached the camp than I assembled all my Thugs, and laid before them a scheme I had long been revolving in my mind. I spoke to them as follows:—

"You have seen, my brethren, that Ghuffoor Khan is a devil; such a person can hardly be called a man. Bad as these Pindharees are, he is the worst among them, and is unfit to live. I felt that Alla would sooner or later urge me on to be the humble means of a retributive justice overtaking him. I have hitherto refrained, though I have sometimes fancied his hour was come. I thought that some crime blacker than any previous one would at last be committed by him, and it has been

done. You all saw what it was. Can he ever do worse?"

"He cannot!" cried my men with one voice; "he has reached the mark, and he is ours."

"He shall be so," said I; "now listen. You know I have still three bottles of the sweet wine of the Feringhees, which I brought with me from Guntoor; he is very fond of it, and will easily be persuaded to come here and drink it with us. I will dose his share with opium, and after a few cups he will become stupified, and will fall an easy prey to us."

"Good!" cried Peer Khan, "it is an excellent plan. What say you to putting it into execution this very night?"

"Not to-night," I said; "we must be cautious in this immense camp. To-morrow let my tent be pitched on the utmost verge of it; nay, a short distance beyond it; and in the dead of the night, when all are overpowered by sleep, he can be despatched."

We then separated for the night.

During the next morning's travel, when we were not separated by the confusion which ensued on a village or town being plundered, I purposely threw myself as much in Ghuffoor Khan's way as I could, and we conversed on the success of our expedition, and the adventures which had befallen us.

"Do you remember, Khan Sahib," said I, "the attack on the houses at Guntoor, and how we ravaged the Feringhees' store-houses in a vain search for valuables? Do you remember, too, the precious stuff I got hold of and recommended to your notice,—the wine in the small bottles with printed papers upon them? It was rare good stuff."

"Mashalla! it was indeed," cried the khan; "the flavour of it did not leave my lips for some days. These infidels know what good wine is, that is certain. Would that I had brought some with me! a few bottles would have been easily carried, and one would have enjoyed it after a day's toil."

"I was more careful than you were, Khan; such wine is not always to be got: I brought away some bottles, and I have them still I believe, if they be not broken.

"It is at your service, Khan; but to escape scandal, what do you say to coming to my tent to-night when it is dusk? that is, if any remains, of which I will give you notice. One of my fellows shall cook a good pilao, and after it we will enjoy the wine quietly."

"Your words are sweet as the wine itself, good Meer Sahib; truly I will be with thee. I will tell my saees to bring my horse and picket him among yours; no one will see me, and I wil' bring no one with me."

My heart leaped to my mouth as he uttered the words. The saddle, then, would be ours without any trouble or risk of detection; how I blessed him for acceding so readily to my plans!

"True, Khan," said I, "it wil' not do to be observed: we must be secret. I will have no one in my tent but Peer Khan, whom you know; he is my foster-brother, and a rare companion: we will have a pleasant carouse. I will send him to you when the pilao is ready."

'No, no!" cried he, "do not, there is no need of it; I will stroll to your tent after dusk. And, hark ye!" said he to his saees, who was trotting after him, "mind, you are to bring my horse and saddle to the Meer Sahib's tent as soon as you see me going towards it. Remember you are to lead it after me as though I were going to ride; and when you arrive there you are to picket it among his horses."

The evening came; the calls of the faithful to evening prayers resounded through the camp with the last red streak of day. Men were assembled in knots, kneeling on their carpets, addressing their prayers to Alla,—men whose hands were scarcely cleansed from the blood they had that day shed! The ceremony over, each separated from his fellow, to lie beside his faithful horse, and to enjoy

a night of repose to fit him for the toil, the rapine, and plunder of the ensuing day.

The time approached; and as I sat in my tent, awaiting the khan's arrival, my heart exulted within me, that for once in my life I should do a good action, in revenging the murdered.

The evening was far advanced, and everything around us was quiet. A few fires, here and there throughout the camp, marked where, at each, a solitary Pindharee cooked his last meal of the day; the rest were already buried in profound slumber, and all nearest to us were still. I stood at the door of my humble tent looking anxiously for the khan's coming; and at length I observed a figure stealing along in the dusk, carefully avoiding the prostrate forms which lay in his path. Was it the khan! Yes. "By Alla he comes!" said I to Peer Khan; "I see him now; and there is his horse behind him, and the saees leading it."

"Is that you, Meer Sahib?" cried the voice of Ghuffoor Khan. "I feared I should have missed your tent in this cursed darkness."

"Here am I, Khan. Welcome to the poor tent of your servant."

"So you have found the wine, eh?" said the khan, rubbing his hands in glee. "You have not cheated me?"

"By your soul, no! Khan, I have not; there it is, you see; and Peer Khan is gone for the pilao."

Peer Khan now entered with the pilao; and seating ourselves our fingers were soon buried in the midst of it.

"Now for the wine, Meer Sahib; the pilao is dry without it, and my throat lacks moisture."

"Here it is," said I, pouring it out into a cup; "see how it sparkles, like the fire of a ruby.

"That bottle is your own share, Khan, and there is besides another for you; Peer Khan and I will divide this one between us. 'Tis a pity there is not more, or that the bottle were not larger."

"It is fit drink for a prince," sighed the khan, when he had finished the bottle, and looking at it with a most rueful countenance. "That is finished, Meer Sahib; thou saidst thou hadst another?"

"Ay, Khan! but only this one," I replied handing him the other.

'I do not doubt it, Meer Sahib. Now help me to rise, for the stuff is in my brain, and the tent goeth round about; help me to rise, I say, and I will quaff the last drop. Ha! said I not well?"

"Excellently well, great Khan," said I, as I helped him to his feet; "now, here is the wine."

"Bismilla!" shouted the Khan, and he drained the cup to the bottom. His head sank on his breast; his eyes rolled wildly; he made a desperate attempt to rush forward, and fell at his full length upon the ground.

"Bus!" cried Peer Khan, as he got out of the way; "enough, great Khan! noble Khan, thou art a dead man now."

"Raise him up," said I to them; "seat him on end. I am ready, and do one of ye give the *jhirnee*."

They raised him up, and as he was seated, his head sank again on his shoulder, and some froth came from his mouth.

"He is dying," said Motee; "we ought not to touch him; it is forbid'en."

"Not a bit of it," said I; "all drunken men are in this way; I have seen hundreds in the same state; so hold his head up, and give the *jhirnee;*" for I had taken my post behind him.

They did so; Peer Khan uttered the fatal words, and Ghuffoor Khan wrestled out his last agony under my never-failing grip.

"Enough, Meer Sahib," said Peer Khan, who was holding his feet; "enough! he is dead."

"Go for the lughaees; he must be put underground immediately," I exclaimed, "Now for the saees."

We left the khan's body and went out; the others

were waiting for us. "Where does he lie?" I asked.

"There," said one of the men; "he is fast asleep, and has been so for an hour."

"So much the better," said Peer Khan, "leave him to me."

I watched him and Motee as they approached the sleeper. Peer Khan touched him with his foot; he started up to a sitting position and rubbed his eyes, but Peer Khan threw himself upon him, and he was dead in an instant, ere he had become conscious. Nothing now remained but the disposal of the bodies and the saddle. The grave, a shallow one, was quickly dug; and while the lughaees were preparing it, myself, Peer Khan, and Motee unripped the lining and pockets of the saddle, and took out the gold. There was naught else. It was in coin, and in small lumps, as the jewels he had gotten in plunder had been melted dowr from time to time. We had no leisure then to speculate on its value, but we cut the saddle to pieces with our knives to make sure that none remained in it, and the fragments were buried with the bodies.

"What shall we do with the horse, Meer Sahib?" asked Motee. "We cannot take him with us, for there is not a man in the camp who does not know Ghuffoor Khan's horse; and we have no time to stain him."

I was puzzled for a while; to have retained the noble animal would have ensured our detection, and I scarcely knew what to do. At last I hit upon an expedient. "He must be destroyed," said I; "it is a splendid beast, certainly, yet our lives are worth more than his. Beyond the camp, about an arrow's flight, is a deep ravine. Do any of you know it?"

"None of us have seen it," said all at once.

"Then I must go myself, and dc you, Ghous Khan (he was one of my men), accompany me; we will throw him into it. Go and loosen him from his pickets."

I followed him, and we conducted the animal to

the edge of the ravine; it was deep, and just suited our purpose, as the banks were precipitous.

"That will do," said I, when he had brought the horse to the edge; "now rein his head to one side; we must kill him before he falls in."

He did so; I had prepared my sword, and drew it sharply across the poor brute's throat; the blood gushed out, he reeled backwards, fell into the dark ravine, and we heard his carcase reach the bottom with a heavy fall. I looked over, but all I saw was an indistinct mass at the bottom, while a few groans of its death-agony reached my ears.

"Enough!" said I; "come away; the jackals will have a glorious feast ere morning, and no one will ever think of looking here. But it was a pity to kill the brute."

CHAPTER XIII.

CHEETOO MAKES A DISCOVERY.

1.—*Amir Ali Listens*

Among the men whom I had brought with me from Jhalone was one by name Hidayut Khan. I had never seen him before, but he was slightly known to Peer Khan, as having served with him, and was represented to be an able Thug. Many days after the death of Ghuffoor Khan, indeed, when we had again reached the Nagpoor territory, and when a few days' march would have brought us to Nemawur, Peer Khan, Motee, and one or two others came to me one evening after it was dark, with faces full of concern and alarm.

"For the sake of Bhowanee," cried I, "what is the matter? why are ye thus agitated? Speak, brothers, and say the worst; are we discovered?"

"Alas, I fear treachery," said Motee. "For some time past we have suspected Hidayut Khan, who has absented himself from us of late in an extraordinary manner, to have disclosed what we are to a person in Cheetoo's confidence. We have dogged them several times about the camp, have detected them in earnest conversation, and this night we too greatly fear he is even now in the durbar. What can be done?"

"We must fly at once," said I. "Now that you mention the name of Hidayut Khan, I, too, have my suspicions; are the horses saddled?"

"They are," said Peer Khan, "they are always so."

"Good," said I; "then there is no fear. Yet I should like much to satisfy myself of the fact of

our being suspected,—ay, and I will ascertain it at once."

"Ah, do not!" cried they; "for the sake of Bhowanee, do not throw yourself into peril; what can be gained by it? Our horses are ready, let us mount them, leave the tent where it is, and fly."

Would that I had followed this wise counsel! Matters would not have turned out as they did; but I was possessed by the idea; a head-strong man is never to be restrained, and I would hear nothing they had to say. "Is there not *one* among you," cried I, "who will accompany me? The night is dark, and we can reach Cheetoo's tent unobserved; we will lie down with our ears to the kanat, and hear what passes. If the worst comes, if we really are denounced, we shall have ample time to fly before they can get from the inside."

"I will," cried Peer Khan; but no one else stirred: they were all paralysed by fear, and were incapable of action.

"That is spoken like yourself, brother," cried I; "thou hast a gallant soul. Now do ye all prepare the horses for instant flight; let their tether-ropes be loosened, and the bridles put in their mouths; do not move them from their places, and no one will suspect us: and come," cried I to Peer Khan, "there is not a moment to be lost."

We stole out of the tent, and stealthily crept along towards Cheetoo's, which was fortunately at no great distance. No one was about it; but we could see from the outside that, by the side of a dim lamp, three persons were engaged in earnest conversation. We lay down at the edge of the kanat, and my ears eagerly drank in the words which fell on them.

"Ajaib!" said a voice, which I knew at once to be Cheetoo's, "and so he murdered the khan? you said *he* did it."

"May I be your sacrifice," said Hidayut Khan (I knew his voice, too, immediately), "he did; I cannot say I saw him die with my own eyes, but

they made him drunk, and they buried him, and Ameer Ali himself destroyed the noble horse."

"I do not doubt it," said Cheetoo, with a sigh; "I have done his memory foul wrong in thinking him ungrateful. And the others?"

"They were men of scarcely any note," said the informer, "nor do I know the names of all; one only I remember, for they had hard work to despatch him: he was a strong man, by name Hubeeb Oola, and belonged to my lord's own pagah."

"I knew him well," said Cheetoo; "he was a worthy man and a brave one: and Ameer Ali slew him?"

"He did, Nuwab, with his own hands; and Motee and Peer Khan held him, or he could not have done it. This was only three nights ago, when I would fain have denounced them, but I feared no one would believe me; and as I knew Ameer Ali was in your favour, I thought no one would have listened to an accusation against him."

"Nor would I, by Alla!" cried Cheetoo, rising up, and striking his forehead in extreme agitation (I had made a hole in the cloth with the point of my dagger, and could see all distinctly). "I would never have believed your tale, but that circumstances so strongly bear out what you have said. Who could have believed that Ameer Ali, the kind, the benevolent,—one who opposed every scheme of violence, and protested against our ravages till I was ashamed of them myself,—who could have thought *him* a Thug?"

"But it is the truth, Nuwab," said the vile wretch; "when you have seized them, you will find ample evidence of what I tell you: the sword of Ghuffoor Khan is at this moment girded to the side of Peer Khan, who threw away his own."

"That will be conclusive, indeed," said Cheetoo. "But how came you to join them?"

"I was at my village, near Jhalone," said Hidayut Khan; "I had formerly known Peeroo (as we call Peer Khan), and he asked me to join him

and his jemadar, and to follow the Pindharees. I never suspected them to be Thugs,—who could, when Ameer Ali and his father were high in favour with the rajah? and it was not till the khan's death that they began their horrible work."

"Well," said Cheetoo, "you have laid the plan; the sooner you put it into execution the better. You have prepared the horsemen, have you not?" said he to the other man, whose face I knew.

"I have," he replied; "they are standing by their horses, all ready for the signal to set on—fifty good fellows; none of the Thugs will escape us."

"Ya Alla!" cried Cheetoo; "how will he look on me? and how can I bring myself to order the punishment he deserves? Ah, Ameer Ali, how thou hast deceived me! how could any one read deceit in that honest face of thine!"

"Go," said he to Hidayut Khan and the others; "bring them to me without delay. I will not forget thy reward; thou hast asked for the saddle of Peer Khan."

"No more! no more!" cried the villain; "'tis all I want."

"Ay," said Peer Khan to me in a whisper, but he has not got it yet, and he is a cunning fellow if he does get it. Come, Meer Sahib, we must be off—they are moving."

I was almost fascinated to the spot. I could have lain there and listened to the discourse; but the peril was too imminent, too deadly for a moment's delay. I got up, and sneaking along, we saw the two figures cross the threshold of the tent, and with hurried steps direct their course to a part of the camp where the pagah was, and which was close to our tent.

Fear lent us speed; we flew to our tent, and for a few moments were engaged in tying up some valuables we had brought out for division; having done this, we hurried to our horses. Some of the men were already in their saddles; I leaped on my

spirited animal, and drew my sword ready for the worst. I wished all to move off in a body, for as yet there was no alarm; but I was deceived—we were surrounded! The instant we were in motion a body of horse dashed at us, and we were at once engaged in a conflict for life or death. What happened I know not; I cut down the only man who was opposed to me; Peer Khan was equally fortunate. I received a slight wound from another, which I little heeded; we urged our horses to their utmost speed, and the darkness favoured our escape.

I soon found, as I slackened my pace a little, that some of my men were with me. We had agreed to take a northerly direction, and rendezvous near a small village which could be seen from the camp; and by this precaution those who had escaped were soon collected together. We were not pursued, though we heard the shouts of the Pindharees, as they hallooed to each other in and about their camp, and the shots from their matchlocks; and we afterwards heard they had grievously wounded many of each other in mistake. I almost dreaded to call over the names of those who stood around me, for I could not see their faces, and no one spoke a word to his companion.

"How many are there of us, Peer Khan?" I asked, in a low tone.

"Eleven," said he; "the rest I fear have fallen."

And we rode on in silence with heavy hearts. We travelled thus for many days. Through the country we passed, we represented ourselves, as long as the Nagpoor territory lasted, to be servants of the government on a secret mission; and though we were often suspected and questioned, yet by my address I brought my band clear out of all the difficulties; and our hearts bounded with joy when at length we arrived on the banks of the noble Nurbudda, and dashing our steeds into the ford soon left its waters between us and our enemies.

2.—A Survivor's Narrative.

Inured as we were to the fatigues of long and severe marches, and our horses also, not a day passed but fifteen or twenty coss were travelled, and at this rate we were not long in reaching our home. I waited not even to quench my raging thirst before I was again in the embrace of Azeema, my own loved one, and peril was once more forgotten.

We assembled in the evening; and as the pockets of our saddles were one by one unripped and their contents heaped on the floor before us, a glorious pile indeed met our view of lumps of gold and silver, the produce of the jewels we had seized, which we had melted down as we got them. There were a few strings of pearls, one of which I laid aside for the rajah; and the whole was then weighed, valued, and distributed. Those whom we supposed to be dead were not forgotten; their shares were laid aside, and afterwards delivered to their families.

I now again enjoyed peace and rest; all idea of joining Cheetoo or any other of the Pindharee leaders was out of the question; for though I might have done so under an assumed name, yet the chance of being recognised would have been too great, and I was rich enough for the present. Cheetoo, too, had reached the summit of his prosperity; his plans were all frustrated by the rash and sudden rise of the Mahratta powers. All they could do was of no avail against the skill and bravery of the Europeans; one by one they were conquered; and Cheetoo, though he might have profited by the generosity of his enemies and accepted a large estate which he was offered by them, could not curb his restless spirit. A few of his men followed his fortunes, but his standard was in vain raised for fresh prospects were blasted; he became a miserable fugitive; and pursued from haunt to haunt, from fastness to fastness, he at last perished miserably by a tiger, in the dense

jungles about the fort of Asseer Ghur. Peace be to his memory! he was a great man, and a skilful and brave leader; and whatever crimes he may have committed in his wild career as a Pindharee chieftain, his dreadful death has been some atonement for them.

I pass over two more years. Why should I fatigue you, sahib, with a relation of daily occurrences, monotonous in themselves, and presenting to my memory not one incident worthy of remark? I will again lead you to the road, and to further adventures.

But, Ameer Ali, said I, did you never hear aught of Motee and your other companions who were seized by Cheetoo?

I had forgotten them, sahib; theirs was a sad fate, as you shall hear.

One evening, about three months after my return home, as I was sitting in the dewan khana of my house, surrounded by some friends, an attendant brought me word that a man was without.

I took up my sword and followed him. It was dusk, and I did not recognise the features of the person who had sent for me; indeed he was so closely muffled that I could hardly see them.

"What is your purpose, friend?" I asked, as the man did not speak, but motioned with his arms under his cloth for my attendant to go away. I bid him begone.

"Jemadar," cried the figure when we were alone, "do you not know me?"

"The voice," said I, "is familiar to mine ears; step into the light that I may see your face."

"No, no!" said the man in a hollow voice, "I cannot bear the light; mutilated and disgraced as I am, the darkness scarcely hides my shame: I am Ghous Khan."

"Ghous Khan!" I cried in amazement; "he is dead, he perished at——"

"It is even so," said the man with a melancholy voice; "Ghous Khan is before you: to prove it, send for a light and look at me."

I brought one myself and held it to his face. I was indeed shocked. Ghous Khan *was* before me, but, oh, how changed! His features were worn and sunken, the brightness of his eye was dimmed, his beard was matted and uncombed, and a few dirty rags covered his head; but what above all shocked me was, that his nose had been cut off close to his face, and the skin of his cheeks and mouth had been drawn together by the healed wound, so that it was tight over them, and imparted to his features a ghastly expression.

"My poor friend!" I exclaimed, embracing him; "how is this? how have you been reduced to this condition? Speak, and tell me what you have suffered."

"The disfigurement of my face is not all, Meer Sahib," said he, throwing off the dirty, ragged sheet which covered him. "Behold these!" and the poor fellow held up to my view the stumps of his arms: his hands had both been cut off between the wrist and the elbow, and the wounds were scarcely healed. Having done this, he sank down on the floor in an agony of grief and shame.

"You of course remember, Meer Sahib," said he, "that fatal night when, just as we were on the point of making off with our booty, we were attacked. The darkness favoured your escape, but on the first onset of the Pindharee horsemen I received a severe spear-wound in the back, which threw me from my horse. I was seized by the Pindharees, bound hand and foot, and carried to the tent of Cheetoo, where there was now a large concourse of people assembled. The wound in my back was staunched and bound up, and in a few moments afterwards other Pindharees entered bearing Motee-ram, who was desperately wounded in the head, and the two others, Nuzzur Ali and Ramdeen Singh, who were untouched. Hidayut Khan was there—the villain and traitor! —and his triumphant glance quailed under mine when I fixed my eyes on him and would not withdraw them.

" Silence was ordered, and Cheetoo demanded with a loud voice of Hidayut Khan, whether he knew any of the persons before him.

" ' I do, Nuwab,' said the wretch; and he named us one by one, and pointed us out

" ' And what have you to say against them? ' asked the chief.

" ' I accuse them of being Thugs,' said he; ' I accuse them of murder,—of the murder of Ghuffoor Khan and of fourteen other good Pindharees: they dare not deny it.' "

" ' Are you not dismayed? ' cried Cheetoo to us.'

" 'No! ' cried we, one and all, ' death must come sooner or later, and ours is now—we fear not.'

" ' They fear it not,' said he to another chieftain; ' death would be welcome to them; but their punishment shall be worse—they shall linger out a miserable existence. Ho! ' cried he to his furashes, ' cut off these villains' noses and hands, and bring them to me.'

' It was done, Meer Sahib! I alone have lived to tell it; our noses were cut off—next our hands. The bleeding stumps were thrust into boiling oil, and we were driven from the camp, there and then to perish, as they thought we should, in the wild jungles. And the other two did perish; we had no one to bind up our wounds, those of Nuzzur Ali and Ramdeen broke out bleeding several days afterwards, they died within two days of each other. So long as we were together, we supported ourselves by begging in the villages, representing ourselves to be villagers from a distant country whom the Pindharees had brought thus far and mutilated, and we procured enough to satisfy the cravings of hunger; but we could get no one to dress our wounds, which were inflamed by the scorching heat of the weather; and, as I said, the two died. Motee we never saw; but he must have died also, for the wound in his head had cut through the

brain, and he never spoke. His was a happy fate compared to ours!

"I have wandered from place to place, proceeding a few coss a day. I have been fed, and my blessings are on those who gave me food for the sake of the Prophet. What I have suffered I cannot describe; but I am now with you again, and your kindness has obliterated it all from my memory. I will live and die with you, if you will grant enough to feed your faithful slave, who will now be only a burden to you."

I was deeply affected at his story. I took the poor fellow under my care, and his wounds were healed; but he never held up his head afterwards. He died before the year was ended, I believe of shame and a sense of his helpless condition.

3.—*Discovery and Punishment.*

During all the years of my work as a Thug, I had never neglected the Rajah on whose lands our village was situated.

From time to time I visited his durbar, and was always received with the greatest civility and attention, as indeed I deserved; for not only was I a good servant to him, but as numbers of Thugs had settled around me in different villages, the revenue they paid for his protection and connivance at our work amounted to a handsome sum yearly; and I need not say it was punctually paid, for upon this mainly depended our concealment. In the last expedition, however, I had pleaded poverty on my return, and though I could have well spared five thousand rupees from my own share, I was content with presenting as my nuzzur a gun I had purchased in Bombay for two hundred rupees, and a small string of pearls. He seemed satisfied; but it was merely the feigned content which precedes a violent outbreak of discontent or passion. He was our bitter deadly enemy, though he cloaked his designs under the garb of friendship, and was gradually perfecting his schemes for our destruction.

I should have mentioned that an English gentleman came to Jhalone; and in the many conferences he held in secret with the rajah, we were given to understand that a treaty of some kind or other had been made, and that he had placed himself under the protection of the English Government. I thought not of it; yet even then a system was working silently yet surely which for a time struck at the power and confederacy of the Thugs a blow as severe, nay more so, as being more lasting, than any they had yet experienced.

The Englishman had left Jhalone some time, and his visit was nearly forgotten by us; my daughter's marriage had begun, and everything was rejoicing in my house. About noon one day one of the rajah's hurkaras came with a message that he required my presence and my father's in the durbar on particular business. In vain was it that I excused myself on the plea of the marriage ceremony. The messenger would take no excuse; and at last, seeing no alternative, we girded our loins and accompanied the hurkara.

We were ushered through the various courts to the dewan khana, where the rajah sat in durbar, surrounded by his mutsuddees and soldiers. Leaving our shoes at the entrance, we were as usual advancing towards his guddee to make the customary salutations, when a sudden rush was made upon us from both sides of the hall, and we were at once seized and disarmed. In vain I struggled with my captors, in vain I attempted to shake them off by the most strenuous exertions; it was useless: I was surrounded and overpowered, my turban was torn rudely from my head, and my arms were bound so tightly with it that I thought the blood would have burst from under my nails. I desisted at last, and remained passive in the hands of the soldiers. 'My hour is come, and my fate has led me on thus far to desert me at last!' thought I; 'it is the will of Bhowanee and of Alla, why should I resist?'

Seeing me quiet, the rajah addressed me.

"Ah Ameer Ali," said he "what is this I hear of thee, that thou art a Thug, a common murderer? Can this be true of one who was looked up to in Jhalone as a merchant and a respectable man? What hast thou to say? Speak, man, and prove if thou canst to me that the accusations I hear against thee are false."

"Rajah," said I, "I know not who hath poisoned thy mind against me or mine; is there any one in your city who can speak one word against me? Have I not been fair and honourable in my dealings with all, and with thyself too? Have not I managed villages and brought them to prosperity from desolation; and can any one, young or old, in this durbar say that I have ever wronged him, or defrauded him of a fraction? Rajah, none can say this; and therefore why am I and my old father thus disgraced in the eyes of the city, and torn from our houses in the midst of the rejoicings of marriage?"

"I accuse thee not," said the rajah; "Bhugwan alone knows whether what I hear is the truth or not; but witnesses are many against thee and the old man: let them speak, and we will afterwards decide in your case. Bring them forth!" cried he to an attendant; "one by one let them give their evidence before these unhappy men: we desire no secrecy in this matter."

There was a moment's pause in the assembly, and every eye—a hundred eyes were upon us. I looked to my father, to see the effect his situation had on him; but I read no hope in the glance he threw on me: his energy had deserted him, and he looked like a convicted felon long before he was so in reality. I turned away from him to look at the man who entered, and then I felt that my doom was sealed. I have never mentioned him, but he had been connected with our gang from the first as a tilhaee, or scout, and had afterwards assisted as a bhuttote on many occasions. His name was Sooruj; he had accompanied me on all my first expeditions, and had served under my father for

some time before I became a Thug; he therefore knew every particular of my career; and until I became a Pindharee described every event with minuteness and fidelity, omitting not one nor adding in any way to those I had been so deeply concerned in. He offered to point out the spots upon which travellers had been destroyed, declared the amount of booty we had gained on many occasions, and ended by denouncing both my father and myself as the greatest leaders in Bundelkhund, as men who could take the field at any time with two hundred followers or more, and as cruel and remorseless Thugs. He dared me to disprove his words, and indeed I quailed under his accusations; for they were true, and truth searches the heart and overwhelms the guilty. But against my father he was the most bitter. "Look on him, Rajah!" cried he; "look on this hoary wretch! One would think that, old as he is, he would have ceased to deprive his fellow-creatures of life; that he would have spent the remainder of his days in propitiating Bhowanee by sacrifices, and his own Prophet by prayers! yet it has not been so. Within the last two months he has returned from an expedition laden with spoil, and the last man he strangled was one of thine own subjects, O Rajah, —one who was respected and beloved here, and whose bereaved family will rue this day that I have declared his fate in your durbar."

"One of my subjects!" cried the rajah; "thou canst not mean it. Speak! and let not fear prevent your disclosing the truth."

"Nay, if your Greatness requires more proof, I can give you some now," continued the approver; "look at the jemadar's hand: he wears on it a ring he took from the body himself, and it may be recognised even by you, Maha Rajah."

My heart sank within me at this new and desperate stroke of fortune. I saw the ring torn from my father's finger; all examined it. A sahoukar who was in the assembly declared it to have

belonged to Jeswunt Mul, and, more than all, his name was engraven on its inner surface.

"Enough!" again cried the rajah, "I know it myself; I could have sworn to that diamond among a thousand. Away with him! chain him to the elephant, let him be dragged through the town, and proclamation made that he was a Thug."

And then my father's proud spirit broke out. With the certainty of death before his eyes he quailed not. While hope remained of life, he had clung to it as every man will; and when I had expected a grovelling entreaty for his life to be spared, from his previous demeanour, he asked it not, but gloried in the cause for which he died.

"Yes," said he, drawing himself up, while his eye glistened proudly, "I scorn to die with a lie upon my lips. I killed Jeswunt Mul because he was a villain, as you are, Rajah! because he employed Thugs, and would not reward them, but wrung from them every rupee he could, as you do. I have murdered hundreds of men because they were given into my hands by Alla, but I never destroyed one with the satisfaction I did your friend. Ay, you were friends and brothers in guilt, and you know it. My life! I care not for it. What has an old man to do with life? his enjoyments are gone, his existence is a burden to him. A short time and nature would have claimed me; you have anticipated the period. Yet, O Rajah, Bhowanee will question you for this deed—for the destruction of her votary. My blood be on your head, and the curse of a dying man be with you! You have deceived me, robbed me, shared my spoils, taken the produce of murder—nay, be not impatient, you know it is the truth, and that Alla, who is the Judge of all, knows it also. He will cast your portion in Jehanum, as a kafir; and Bhowanee will rejoice that the destroyer of her votary writhes in the torments of the damned."

"Gag him! strike the kafir's mouth with a shoe!" roared the rajah in a fury, more like that of a beast than a man, as he foamed at the mouth.

"Away with him. And let his son look on his dying agony."

And they dragged us both forth; I should not say my father, for his step was firm. I struggled against my tormentors, but it availed me not. "One word, my father!" cried I to him as we were brought near each other; "wilt thou not speak to thy son?"

He turned his head, and a tear stood in his eye. "I leave thee, Ameer Ali; but thou knowest a believer's Paradise, and the joys which await him. Thou art not my son, but I have loved thee as one, and may Alla keep thee!"

"No more!" cried the rough soldiers, striking him on the mouth, and dragging him forward.

"Revenge me!" exclaimed my father in Ramasee; "tell the English of that monster's conduct to us, and when he is torn from his seat of pride, my soul will be happy in Paradise."

He spoke no more; I was held forcibly, so that I saw the end of that butchery. They secured him by a chain round his loins to the forefoot of the elephant, and they tied his hands behind him, so that he could not save himself by clinging to it. He still continued repeating the Kulma. But now all was ready—the mahout drove his ankoos into the head of the noble beast, which uttering a loud scream dashed forward. A few steps, and my father's soul must have been in paradise.

CHAPTER XIV.

1—*The Criminal Banished.*

Sahib, can I describe to you the passions which then burned in my heart? I cannot. A thousand thoughts whirled through my brain, till I thought myself mad; perhaps I was. Revenge for my father was uppermost; and oh that I could have got loose! Unarmed as I was, methinks I would have sprung on the rajah and strangled him. But resistance was unavailing; the more I struggled, the tighter my arms were bound, until they swelled so that the pain became excruciating, and I well-nigh sank under it. I suffered my guards to lead me away from the durbar; I was thrust into a vile hole, and at last my arms were unbound.

Men gazed at me in my cage as though I had been a tiger, and mocked and derided me. The boys of the town hooted me, and thrust sticks at me through the iron gratings. One and all reviled me in the most opprobrious terms they could devise,—me! the respectable, nay, the wealthy, to whom they had bowed before, when I basked in the sunshine of the rajah's favour; but I was degraded now. Alas! my dreams, my forebodings had come to pass: they had been indefinite shadows, this was the reality.

The whole day passed—I had no food, no water. It was in the height of the burning season, and I, who had been pampered with luxuries, who in my own abode should have drunk of refreshing sherbets, prepared by Azeema, was denied a drop of water to cool my burning throat. In vain I implored those nearest to me, in words that would have moved aught but hearts of stone, to intercede

with the jemadar who guarded my prison to allow me a draught of the pure element. I might as well have spoken to the scorching blast that whistled into my cage—bringing with it clouds of dust, which were increased by the unfeeling boys when they saw I shrank from them. Thus the day passed: evening came, and still no water, no relief, no inquiry into my condition. Had I been placed there to die? And no sooner had the thought flashed across my mind than I brooded over it. Yes, I was to die: to expire of thirst and hunger. And then, oh how I envied my father's fate!

How anxiously and impatiently I looked for the first man who should enter the court where my prison was! One came, he passed through and heeded not my piteous cries; another and another; none looked on me, and again I thought I was to die. Another came; I called, and he turned to regard me. He was one that I knew, one who had eaten of my bread and my salt, and had been employed about my house, and he had pity; he had a remembrance of what I had done for him: he came, and looked on me. I spoke to him, and he started, for my voice was hollow, and thin and hoarse. "Water!" cried I, "for the sake of the blessed Prophet, for the sake of your mother, one drop of water! I have tasted none since I was confined."

"Alas!" said he in a low tone, "how can it be, Meer Sahib? The rajah has threatened any one with death who speaks to you or brings you food."

Again I implored; and I who had been his master prostrated myself on the ground and rubbed my forehead in the dust. He was moved—he had pity and went to fetch some; fortunately no one saw him, and he brought a small earthen pot full, which I drank as though it had been that of the well of paradise. Again and again he took it and refilled it; and at last he left me, but not before he had promised to visit me in the night, bring me a cake of bread if he could, and, more than all, news of Azeema and of my house.

The next day passed, and I had no food. I treasured up the water which had been left with me and sipped it now and then; but by nightfall again I was in torment. Yet I had hopes, for I knew that the young man would not deceive me; he had sworn by his mother's head to bring me food, and he could not break his oath.

And he came. I had sat watching with that anxiety which can only be known by those who have been in a situation like mine, listening to every distant footfall, to every noise, as though it were the step of him I looked for. I have said he came; he was muffled in a blanket, and had stolen in unobserved by the lazy sentinel at the gate; he brought me food, a few coarse cakes, and an earthen pot of milk. "Eat!" said he in a low tone; "I will sit here, and will tell you the news you bade me inquire for afterwards. I was ravenous, and I ate; coarse bread, such as I should have loathed three days before, was now a luxury, sweet and grateful; I ate it, drank the milk, and was thankful; and I called him and blessed him for his venturous daring, and for his gratitude to one who could no longer do him a kind turn. "And the news, Gholam Nubbee? can you tell me aught of *her* and my child?"

"My news is bad, Meer Sahib, and I am the unwilling messenger of tidings which will grieve your soul and add to your misery."

"Say on," said I: "tell me the worst; tell me she is dead, and you will only say what my soul has forewarned me of."

He paused for awhile. "You must know it sooner or later, Meer Sahib—she is dead."

"And my child?"

'She is with the good moolla who protected your wife when she had no longer a house to cover her, and who performed the last rites of our faith to her when she was dead."

"No home!" cried I; "they did not drive her forth?"

"They did, Meer Sahib. The rajah sent sol-

diers; your house was stripped of everything, and your gold and silver, they say, was a prize he little expected; your wife and child were turned into the street, with only the clothes they had upon their persons. But to her it little mattered, for I have heard she never spoke from the time she knew of your father's fate and the cause of your imprisonment. They say she sat in a stupor, like a breathing corpse, without speaking a word to say where her pain was."

"Enough!" said I, "go; may Alla keep you! I would now be alone, for grief sits heavy on me."

Then she was dead—my Azeema, my beloved! she for whom I could myself have died, she whom I had loved as man can only love once—she was dead; she had known that I was a Thug, and that had killed her. It was well—better far that she should have died, than lingered on to be scoffed at and insulted as the wife of one who was now a convicted murderer. Had she lived I could never have dared to approach her, for she was pure, and I——!

I may say I almost rejoiced at her death, sahib; I did not grieve as I should have done had the blow fallen on me while I was yet in prosperity: then it would have been hard indeed to bear; but now I was altered, and she was dead; and again I say it was well. Alla in His mercy had taken her from her scene of suffering, almost before she knew to its full extent the horrible reality. And my child too was safe; she was in friendly hands, and the moolla would be a father to her.

The day after the nocturnal visit of my humble friend, food was allowed me. It was scanty to be sure, but still I existed, though worn down by sufferings, which I have no words to express, to a shadow of what I was. Three months passed thus, and they appeared to me like years when I looked back on them.

At the end of this time I was taken to the rajah's durbar. Few were the words he spoke to me, but those were bitter ones; for he had shared my spoil,

taxed me for protection, and, after putting my father to death, he had plundered my home, and his booty was the accumulation of mine for years past. I say my father, and yet he had told me he was not my parent. But what mattered that now? He was dead, and the mystery of my birth, if any had ever existed, was gone with him. What mattered it too who was my father? I was alone in the world; not a tie, save one, bound me to existence. My daughter was with strangers, and in a few years she would forget me,—truly I might say I was alone.

I was in the rajah's durbar—I had no friend; no one of all those by whom he was surrounded, who had formerly courted me, eaten of my bread, and flattered me that I was yet to rise to greatness under his patronage—not one spoke for me, not one interceded to avert my shame. The rajah spoke to me.

"Amir Ali," said he, "I had trusted thee, I had thought thee honest (how he lied as he spoke!), I had believed thee a rich and fortunate merchant; but, O man! thou hast deceived me, and not me alone, but thousands, and thou art a Thug and a murderer. Still, because I have a lingering sentiment of kindness towards thee, I do not seek thy death. Justice has been satisfied in the destruction of the hoary villain who made thee what thou art, and who led one who might have been an ornament to the world to be a wretch upon whose head is the blood of hundreds. Yes, Amir Ali, I speak truth, and thou knowest it. And though I desire not thy death, yet thou canst not be released without a mark on thy brow that men may know and beware of. Throw him down," cried he to the attendants, "and let him be branded!"

They threw me down. Sahib, what could my attenuated and wasted frame do against men who had suffered no misery like mine? I struggled, yet it was unavailing; they held my arms, and legs, and head, and a red-hot pice was pressed upon

my forehead; it was held there as it burned down to the bone, and my very brain seemed to be scorched and withered by the burning copper. They took it off, and raised me up.

"Away with him!" cried the rajah, "away with him! Release him at the boundary of my territory. And mark me," he continued, addressing himself to me, "I have given thee thy life, Amir Ali: go, and be wise; learn by what has happened to be an honest man for the future; and, above all, remember that if ever thou art seen in Jhalone again, or in any ot my towns or villages, nothing will be able to save thee from the feet of an elephant."

He rose and strode out of the durbar; and in pain and misery, I was conducted in two days to the frontier of his country and unbound. Two rupees were given to me, and again the wide and cruel world was before me. I hurried from my late keepers. I bound my turban over my still burning and aching brow, so that man might not see my shame, and took the road before me. I wandered almost unconscious of anything, save the pain I was suffering until night fell around me, and I directed my steps to a village, the lights of which were a short distance before me. Exchanging one of my rupees, I sat down at the shop of a bhutteara and satisfied my craving appetite; there I slept, and when I arose was refreshed, and again believed myself to be Amir Ali. The morning breeze blew fresh on my face as I took my way out of the town; the refreshing rest of the night had invigorated me, and I bounded along with a light heart—yes, with a light heart, for I was free! I had no thought for the past now. It was my fate which had been fulfilled; what had been written in my destiny had come to pass. As I proceeded, a jackass brayed on my right hand, and I hailed the favourable omen with a joy I can feebly express. Yes, great Bhowanee, mother of men! cried I aloud, I answer to thy omen; I am ready, and again devoted to thy service. I have sinned against

thee; I had wilfully avoided thy warning omens, led on by an irresistible destiny and by a proud heart. I have been punished, and have bought a dear experience; but henceforward no votary of thine breathing shall excel Ameer Ali in devotion to thee; and therefore, great goddess, vouchsafe the thibao and pilhaoo. And they were granted: the omen on the right was followed by that on the left, and I felt that I was pardoned, and again accepted as a Thug.

2.—*Father and Child*

After many wanderings and adventures, a strong desire to see my old home came upon me, and with a band of Thugs whom I had collected, I returned to Jhalone.

Considering the risk we ran, in approaching a place where inevitable death awaited *me* should I be discovered, we did well to disguise ourselves as gosaeens. We covered our bodies with ashes, matted the hair on our heads with mud, hung gourds at our waist, and in this mean and wretched disguise we entered the town—that spot where I had passed so many years of happiness, where my fairest prospects had been blighted, and the resolutions I had formed of leading a new life and forsaking Thuggee rendered alike impracticable and distasteful to me. My emotions on entering the town, and more than all on passing the house where I had resided, were overpowering; but I rallied my heart. I passed through the city, and my friend and myself took up our abode for the day near a well outside the gates, which was not far from the spot where I had buried my treasure.

As the evening approached, I strolled towards the trees under which was deposited the sum I had hoarded up to serve me at any time of need. It was a deserted burial-place, overgrown by custard-apple bushes and other brushwood, and the rank grass had sprung up from the frequent rain. My heart beat quick as I approached the spot; my hoard might have been discovered, and if it had

been removed my child would be a beggar, dependent upon the charity of strangers; she might even be thrust into the street, to herd with the vile and worthless, when the care of her became irksome or expensive to her present protectors. But anything, thought I, is better than that she should accompany me, where a life of hardship would be her portion, and where she could not escape the contamination which scenes of guilt and murder would effect in a short time, and from which, alone as I was, I could not protect her.

I reached the tomb in which, by removing a stone, I had placed the vessel containing the money. I hardly dared look at the well-remembered spot, hardly dared attempt to remove the stone; but I did remove it, and, O joy of joys! there was my treasure undisturbed. I hastily seized the earthen vessel, and crawled with it into the thickest of the underwood ere I ventured to open and examine it. I had forgotten what it contained, and the contents surpassed my expectations. I found thirty ashruffees and four small bars of gold, a box containing two strings of pearls of some value and some jewels, and tied up in a rag were some loose stones of value, one of them a diamond of great lustre and beauty. The jewels I determined to keep, as they might be afterwards of use to me, not only from their value, but to enable me to assume the character of a dealer in precious stones, which is always a respectable calling, and for which, in the jewels before me, I had ample stock for trade. I replaced the vessel and its precious contents, which could not have been worth less than a thousand rupees; and I felt my heart lightened of a load, both at seeing my treasure safe, and at the assurance it gave me that by means of it my daughter would be decently provided for. I returned to my companion, who had been anxiously watching my proceedings, and he too rejoiced at my good fortune.

I did not proceed into the town till it was dusk: the gates, I knew, would be open until long after

dark, and I went alone to avoid any chance of being remarked. I soon reached the house of the moolla, when, abandoning my character of a gosaeen, I asked for alms in a lusty voice in the name of Moula Ali of Hyderabad. Fortunately the old moolla was sitting alone in his verandah; I saw him through the open gate, and advanced rapidly, shutting it behind me. He was engaged in reading his Koran, and was rocking himself to and fro, apparently absorbed in the book before him, so that he did not observe my approach; nor was he aware of my presence till I had prostrated myself before him.

"Punah i Khoda!" he exclaimed; "what is this, a gosaeen? Thou must be mad, good friend; or what seekest thou with the old moolla? Speak, thou hast almost frightened me, and disturbed my meditations on the holy volume."

"Pardon, Moollajee!" I cried; "you see one before you who has risked his life to speak with you, and you must listen to me for a few moments. I know you well, though you do not recognise me in this disguise."

"I know thee not, friend," he said; "nevertheless, if I can do aught to serve thee, speak; yet it is seldom that the Hindoo seeks the house of the priest of the Moslem faith; and I am in astonishment at thy garb and address."

"Moolla!" I said, "I would fain speak with thee in absolute secrecy; are we secure from interruption here? Fear me not; I come with good intent, and am not what you think me, but one of thine own faith;" and I repeated the Belief.

"Strange, most strange is this," said the old man rising; "I doubt thee not—no one would do the old moolla harm; and so, as thou requirest secrecy, I will but fasten the outer gate and join thee instantly." He did so, and returned.

"Moolla," said I, when he was once more seated, and was prying into my face with a look of mingled curiosity and wonder, "Moollajee! O Wullee Mahomed! dost thou not recognise me?"

"Thy voice is familiar to mine ears," said the old man, "yet I remember not thy features. Who art thou?"

"Mine is a name which may hardly be pronounced in Jhalone," I replied; "but we are alone. Have you forgotten Amir Ali?"

"Punah!" exclaimed the moolla, sidling away from me to the edge of his carpet; "Punah i Khoda! do I behold that bad and reckless man?"

"Bad I may be, Moolla," said I quietly; "and reckless I certainly am; yet I wish you no harm. You were kind to one I loved—you have my child in your house—it is of them I would speak, not of myself. Tell me, for the sake of Alla, whether my child is well—tell me whether she lives, and I will bless you." I gasped for breath while he replied, lest I should perchance have to hear of further misfortune.

"This is madness, Amir Ali," said he; "know you not that your father's fate awaits you if you are discovered here?"

"I know, I know all," said I; "and I have braved everything. I have sought you despite of danger—for my heart clove to my child, and I would fain hear of her. Ah, friend, think not of what I was, and be merciful to me."

"Unhappy man!" he cried; "thy crimes brought with them their own reward; but I will not speak of the past. Know then that thy daughter is well; but she grieves still for thee and for her mother, whom Alla in mercy removed from her sufferings before she knew her degradation."

"Shookr Khoda!" I exclaimed. "Ah Alla, Thou art merciful even to me. And my child is well, and remembers me?"

"She does, Meer Sahib; she often speaks of you, but we have told her you a.e dead, and she no longer thinks of you as one whom she may ever meet again."

"And you are right," said I; "you are wise in having done this. May Alla repay your kindness to a deserted child, for I cannot. I have sought

you for a purpose which you must promise to agree to, even before I speak it—it is the only request I shall ever make for my child, and from henceforth you will never see my face again nor hear my name."

"Speak," said the moolla; "I promise nothing, Amir Ali; thou hast deceived thousands, and the old moolla is no match for thee in deceit."

"Briefly then," said I, "there was a small treasure which I buried in a field here long ago; I have returned and found it safe. It is a trifle, yet it is of no use to me; and I would give it over to you, both as a portion for my daughter when she is married, and as some provision for her until that can be effected. One favour I would beg,—it is to see my child: one look will be sufficient for my soul to dwell on in after years, for I am assured that it will be the last—you will not deny me?"

"I will not, Meer Sahib; she is now at play with a neighbour's child in the zenana, and if you will follow me I will show her to you. One look must be sufficient for you; after that she is mine, and I will be a father to her. Follow me."

I did; I followed him through a court-yard to the door of a second, which was the entrance to his zenana. I heard the merry voices of the children, as they played with light and joyful hearts, and I could distinguish the silvery tones of my precious child's voice, so like those of her mother, which were now silent for ever.

"We will not disturb them, Meer Sahib," said the moolla in a whisper as he pushed open the door gently; "look in, so that you may not be seen; you will easily distinguish your daughter."

Yes, she was there, my child, my beautiful child! still delicate and fragile as she had ever been; but her face had a joyous expression, and she was as merry as those by whom she was surrounded. Long, long I gazed, and oh, my heart yearned to rush in, and for the last time to clasp her to my bosom and bless her. But I restrained myself;

she would not, could not have recognised me in the disguise I wore, and I should have only needlessly alarmed and terrified her. Yet I put up a fervent prayer to Alla for her protection and happiness, and I tore myself from the spot—dejected, yet satisfied that she still lived and was happy.

I wept! yes, I sat at the threshold of what had been my own home and wept, yet not aloud. My eyes were a fountain of tears, and they welled over their lids, and coursed down my rough visage, and fell hot upon my hands.

How long I thus sat I know not; but arousing myself by a sudden thought of the danger I was in, I rose up, took one long, sad survey of what was once my own, but which was now deserted, and hurrying away from the spot, I reached the gate as it was about to be shut, and soon afterwards joined my companion.

At length we reached Calpee, where we found the band and their families; and at a council of all assembled, after many plans of proceeding had been discussed and many plans proposed for our final settling-place by the different members, I opened to them one of my own which I had long entertained. It was, to proceed to Lukhnow by a boat, which could be easily hired, and to remain there, as it was a city which promised an ample harvest to a Thug; and, from the not over-strict character of its government, a more likely one than any other to enable us to pursue our calling with security. The plan was agreed on; and the next morning I betook myself to the Ghaut, to hold communication with the manjees of the boats, and so strike a bargain for their conveyance of my party.

All was arranged to the satisfaction of my associates; and at the hour appointed, which had been declared a lucky moment by some astrologer employed by the boatmen, the anchor was raised, and a fair wind carried us rapidly over the smooth waters.

At Lukhnow we lived for some time upon the

proceeds of our last booty, and I established a small traffic in precious stones upon those I had brought with me; but it yielded small returns to me, and I only delayed commencing operations till I could fix upon some settled plans. At length I thought I would attempt the same system we had practised so successfully at Hyderabad. No sooner had the idea possessed me than I longed to put it into execution; the more so, as my associates received it with ardour, and seemed strongly convinced of its practicability. We were unknown in that crowded and vicious city, lived in an obscure part, and could never be suspected in our daily perambulations through the bazars in search of bunj. And so it turned out: we were in great luck for two months, money flowed in upon us, and we had killed upwards of thirty persons, mostly travellers to distant parts, whom we decoyed from the serais; and as we succeeded, I had more money at my disposal and was enabled to bribe several of the serai-keepers; and, by allowing them to participate to a large amount in our gains, I secured admission to the serais, and had facilities of speaking with travellers which I should never have enjoyed had I neglected to secure their goodwill. But fortune was against me despite of this cheering commencement, and we did not long enjoy an easy and profitable career.

We had one day taken out of the city a party of seven travellers, we being sixteen Thugs in number. I well remember it was a Friday, an unlucky day at best. Among the Thugs was an old man, one of the old Murnae stock, a capital bhuttote, who had joined us a short time before; he had known my father, and me when a child, and had recognised me in a street in Lukhnow, which led to his joining us. We had taken the travellers to a favourite bhil of ours about four coss distant, and were in the act of strangling them,—some even lay dead on the ground, and the rest were in their last agonies,—when by the merest chance a body of horse, which were on their way from the city to a distant

pergunnah, came upon us. We had grown too confident from our frequent success,—it was still far from morning, and we had neglected to place scouts. The horse came upon us unheard and unseen, and, as I have told you, caught us in the very act. Nine of us were seized after a faint resistance; the rest, fortunate men! made their escape. Our hands were bound behind us and we were dragged into the city, objects of wonder and terror to the inhabitants. The bodies were brought in after us; and two of the travellers who had been only half strangled, and were revived by the horsemen, gave so clear an account of our whole proceedings, how we had inveigled them and accompanied them on their march till we attacked them unawares, that no doubt remained of our guilt; and after our brief trial had been concluded before the kazee, we were cast into prison, to await our fate. The old Thug and myself had been bound together, and we were in this state thrust into one of the narrow cells of the jail. There we were told we should remain till the pleasure of the king was known regarding us.

3.—*In Prison.*

Again I was in prison; and although not in such wretched plight as I had been at Jhalone, for the cell was roomy and tolerably clean, yet still it was a prison,—confinement to my limbs and to my spirit; a conviction which threatened my life hung over me; and as I saw no prospect of escape I was resigned to die, and to meet my fate like a man and a Thug who had been familiar with death from his childhood.

A week passed thus—a long, interminable week. In vain was it that I implored my jailers to relieve me from suspense, to tell me whether I was to live or die; either they knew not, or their hearts were hardened towards me—they would not tell me.

But after the expiration of this period, we were not long ignorant of our sentence. We were informed that seven of our companions had been

detected in the act of strangling travellers. But there was no evidence against us so conclusive; the merchants who had escaped the fate of their associates could not swear that we had murdered any of those who had perished; and the horsemen who had captured us knew no more than that we were of the party. If this had been all, we should probably have been released; but one of the miserable men who had been executed, in a vain attempt to preserve his life, confessed his crimes; and by this last stroke of ill fortune we were convicted, and the decree went forth that we were to be imprisoned for life.

There was one among the guards of the prison, a young man, who was always kinder in his deportment to us than any of the others. The food he brought us was better, and the water always pure, and in a clean vessel. He used to cheer us too sometimes with the hope that our imprisonment would not last so long as had been decreed; and he instanced the cases of several criminals who had been sentenced like us, but who had been released when the memory of their crimes had ceased to occupy the minds of the officers in charge of the prison. He had our clothes washed for us, and did a thousand kind acts—trifles perhaps, but still more than we experienced from any other of his companions.

It was with him, therefore, that I proposed to my fellow-captive to try our long-brooded and cherished scheme of deliverance. The next time it was his turn to attend us, I begged he would come to the cell at night or in the evening, when he would be secure from observation, for that I had something particular to communicate to him. He came in the evening of that day, and seated himself, muffled in a dark-coloured blanket, close to the bars of our cell.

"You have something to say, I think," said he in a low tone, "and I have done your bidding; I am here."

"I have, good Meer Sahib," said I (for he was

also a syud); "listen, for what I would communicate to you will be for your benefit, if you will enter into my plans."

"Say on," replied the youth; "you may command my utmost exertions."

"To be brief, then," I continued, "you must endeavour to effect our escape."

"It is impossible," he said.

"Not so," cried I; "nothing is impossible to willing hands and stout hearts. You can manage everything if you will but listen to me. When we were apprehended, we had saved a round sum of money, which is concealed in a spot I can tell you of, if you will be faithful to us. Half of it shall be yours, if you will only aid us."

"How much is it?" he asked.

"Upwards of five hundred rupees" said I; "it was securely hidden, and no one can have discovered it. I repeat, half of it shall be yours if you will assist us."

"How can I?" cried he, in a tone of perplexity; "how is it possible that you can pass these doors and walls, even were you as free as I am at this moment?"

"Leave that to me," said I; "do you accept the offer?"

"I will consider of the matter, and will be here at this time to-morrow, to give you a final answer."

The next evening he came at the same time, and seated himself as before.

"What would you have me do, Meer Sahib?" he asked; "I am ready to obey your commands if they are practicable. First, however, I must be secure of the money you have mentioned; I must receive it before I peril my situation, and, more than that, my life in your behalf."

"Listen then, Meer Sahib," said I; "I trust you,—you are a syud and I also am one; you dare not deceive me, and incur the wrath of Alla."

"I will not, by the Prophet, whose descendant I am," said he; "were the Koran in my hands this moment, I would swear upon it."

"No, no," said I, "do not swear; the word of an honest man is far more binding than an oath. I believe that you are true, and therefore it is that I trust you. First, then, as regards the money; do you remember two old tombs, one of them much broken, which stand near the river's brink over the north side of the city, about a cannon-shot from the walls?"

"I do, perfectly."

"Then," I continued, "in that broken one is an earthen vessel, containing the money; the vault where of old the body of the person over whom the tomb was erected was deposited, can be opened by removing four stones, which are loose, from the eastern side of it; they are neither large nor heavy, and you can manage the matter alone. In the cavity you will find the vessel, and the money is in it. I shall require half for my expenses. Now all I ask you for the present to do in return is, to procure us two small and sharp files and some ghee; and when we have cut through our chains, and one of these bars, I will tell you how you can aid us further."

"I will perform all you wish," said the youth; "and, you shall have the files to-morrow night by this time, if I find that your statement about the money is true."

He then left us, and we anxiously and impatiently awaited his coming the next day. Nor did he disappoint us.

"I have come, as you see, Meer Sahib," he said; "and, behold, here are the files for you—they are English, and new and sharp; here too is the ghee. I have fulfilled my promise."

"And the money?" I asked.

"Without it you would not have seen me to-night, I can tell you, Meer Sahib. I have got it; the amount is five hundred and fifty rupees, and you shall be welcome to your share when you have got out of this hole. And how do you intend to manage this part of your scheme?"

"Are the gates of the prison shut at night?" I asked.

"No," he replied; "that is, the gate is shut, but the wicket is always open."

"And how many men guard it?"

"Only one, Meer Sahib; the rest sleep soundly after mid-night."

"It is well," said I; "we can but perish in the attempt, and I for one would gladly die, rather than linger out a wretched existence here."

"And I also," said my companion.

"I fear I cannot assist you," said the man; "yet stay, suppose you were to attempt your escape when I am on guard."

"We will attempt it then, and may the Prophet aid us. All night we will work at our irons and one of these bars, and to-morrow night we shall be free. Go, kind friend, you do but risk detection in being seen here."

The morning broke and we rested from our labour; one strong shake would have separated the bar, and our irons were so nearly cut through at the ankles and the waist, that a slight wrench would have divided them. Our friend we knew was faithful, for he had proved himself so, and we enjoyed a silent anticipation of our eventual triumph.

It was about noon, I think, that a party of the soldiers of the prison, headed by the darogha, approached our cell. My heart sank within me as I saw them coming, and the haste with which they advanced towards us increased my alarm and apprehension. "We are lost!" said I to my companion; "they have discovered our plans." He did not reply, but despair was written on his countenance.

The darogha applied his key to the lock; it was opened, and the whole party rushed in and seized us.

"What new tyranny is this?" I exclaimed; "what new crime have we committed, that we are again to be ill-treated?"

"Look to their irons!" cried the darogha to his men.

"You have been busy it seems," said he to us, when they found them in the state I have described. "Let me give you a piece of advice; when you next file your irons, either use more ghee or make less noise. But you will hardly have another opportunity I think. Search them well," continued he to the men; "see where these instruments are which they have used so cleverly."

"Enough!" said the darogha. "You were a fool, O Meer Sahib, for this wild attempt. Had you been content to bear your deserved imprisonment, mercy might in time have been shown to you; but now, give up all hope; you have forfeited that mercy by your own imprudence, and you will long live to repent it. Bring them along," said he to his men; "we must put them into narrower and safer lodgings."

A narrow passage, between two high walls, which but just admitted of a man's passing along it, contained, about half way down, two cells, more like the dens of wild beasts than aught else. They were more strongly grated than the last we had been in, and were not half the size Far heavier irons than those we had last worn were fastened on our legs by a blacksmith, and we were thrust into our horrible abodes.

"Now," said the darogha, "get out if you can, Meer Sahib. If walls and iron bars can hold you, you are pretty safe here, I think."

Months rolled on. Though only a strong grating of iron bars divided me from my old companion, we seldom spoke to each other; at most it was a word, a passing remark hazarded by the one, and scarcely heeded by the other, so absorbed were we in our misery. I ate and drank mechanically, I had no craving for food; and what they gave us to eat was of the coarsest kind. The filth which accumulated in our cells was removed only once a week, and it bred vermin which sorely tormented us. Oh that I could die! I cried a

thousand times a day. Alas! my prayer was not granted.

The second year of our captivity passed— the same unvarying rotation of misery,—no change, no amelioration of our condition. We existed, but no more; the energies of life were dead within us. I used to think, were I ever released, that I could not bear the rude bustle of the world; that I should even prefer my captivity to its anxieties and cares. It was a foolish thought, for I often yearned for freedom, and occupied my mind with vain thoughts and plans for future action, should any lucky chance give me my liberty; but no ray of hope broke in upon the misery of my dungeon.

4.—*Amir Ali Learns the Story of His Life.*

I mean not to say that my companion, the old Thug, and I never conversed; we did so now and then; we recounted our exploits again and again, and by thus recalling mine to my memory, from the beginning of my career, I stored up in my mind the adventures and vicissitudes I have related to you. One day we had been talking of my father, an his parting words to me, "I am not your father," flashed across my thoughts. I mentioned the circumstance to the old Thug, and earnestly requested him to tell me what he knew of Ismail, and of my early state.

"What!" he asked, "so you know not of it, Meer Sahib? Surely Ismail must have told you all? And yet," continued he after a pause, "he would not have done it—he dared not."

"What can you mean," cried I, "by saying he dared not? Was I his son, or did he say truly when he declared I was not?"

"He spoke the truth, Meer Sahib. I know your origin, and it is just possible there may be one or two others who do also, and who are still living; one of these is Ganesha."

"Ganesha!" I exclaimed; "My soul has ever told me that he knew something of me. I have striven in vain to bring any scene in which he was

concerned with me to my recollection, and always failed. By your soul! tell me who and what I was."

"'Tis a long tale, Amir Ali," said the old man, "but I will endeavour to remember all I can of it; it is one too which, were you not what you are, would horrify you."

"My parents were murdered then?" said I, my heart sinking within me. "I have sometimes thought so, but my conjectures were vague and unsatisfactory."

"You have guessed truly, Meer Sahib. But listen, my memory is still fresh, and you shall know all."

"Ismail, your father, as he called himself to you, became a Thug under Hoosein Jemadar, whom no doubt you remember. I well recollect the day he joined us, at a village not very far from Delhi; I was then a youth, and belonged to the band of which Hoosein was one of the best bhuttotes."

"I know Ismail's history," said I; "he related it to me."

"Then I need not repeat it," he continued. "In time Ismail, by his bravery and wisdom, rose far above Hoosein, and became the jemadar of a band of thirty Thugs. It is of this time I would speak. We were one day at a village called Eklera, in Malwa, encamped outside the place, in a grove of trees near a well. We had been unlucky for some time before, as it was the season of the rains, when but few travellers are abroad, and we were eagerly looking for bunij.

"Ismail and Ganesha, had been into the bazar, and returned with the joyful news that a party was about to set off towards Indoor, and that we were to precede them by a march, and halt whenever we thought them secure to us. I and another Thug were directed to watch their movements, while the main body went on. The information was correct, and we dogged them till the third or fourth march, when at a village, whose name I forget, we found the band halted, and rejoined it. The party con-

sisted of a respectable man and his wife and child, an old woman, and some young men of the village who accompanied them. The man rode a good horse, and his wife travelled in a palankeen. They were your parents, Meer Sahib."

"Go on," said I in a hoarse voice; "my memory seems to follow your narration." O sahib! I was fearfully interested and excited.

"Well," continued he, "not long after they had arrived, Ismail and Ganesha went into the bazar, dressed in their best clothes, to scrape an acquaintance with your father, and, as Ismail told us afterwards, this was effected through you. He saw you playing in the streets, gave you some sweetmeats, and afterwards rescued you from the violence of some of the village boys, who would have robbed you of them. This led to his speaking with your mother, and eventually to his becoming acquainted with your father. The end of all was, that they agreed to accompany us, and dismissed the young men by whom they had been previously attended. Does your memory aid you now, Meer Sahib, or shall I finish the relation?"

"It does," said I, "most vividly as you proceed. But go on; without your assistance, I lose the thread of my sad history." He resumed.

"Ismail in those days always rode a good horse, as also did Ganesha. He grew fond of you and you of him, and he used to take you up before him and carry you most part of the march, or till you became fatigued. This went on for some days, but we were approaching Indoor, and it was necessary to bring the matter to a close; besides, our cupidity was strongly excited by the accounts we heard from Ismail of your father's wealth, as he had told him that he carried a large sum of ready money with him. At last the bhil was determined, —I could show it you now: it was close to a river, and, before the party had crossed, the *jhirnee* was given. We strangled them all. Ganesha killed your mother, the old woman was allotted to me; Ismail had his share also, and I believe it was your

father. You had been riding upon Ismail's horse all the morning, at least after the rain had ceased, and when the *jhirnee* was given you were half across the river; I saw you fall, and as you did not move afterwards, I thought you were killed. You moved, however, and Ganesha ran towards you: he threw the roomal about your neck, and was in the act of strangling you, when Ismail, who had uttered a cry of despair on seeing Ganesha's action, arrived just in time to prevent his deadly purpose. They had a serious quarrel about you, and even drew their swords; but Ismail prevailed, and led you to where the bodies were lying and being stripped by the lughaees. You became frantic when you saw your mother; you clung to her body and could hardly be torn from it; you raved and cursed us all, but terror overcame you at last, and perhaps pain also, for you fainted. Ismail, when the bodies had been disposed of, and the plunder collected, mounted his horse and took you up before him; and turning off the road, we travelled in another direction.

"How you ever bore that journey I know not; you were a thin and delicate child, and we all said you would die; but you bore it well, and when we reached a place in the jungle, I was sent to a village for milk, and drank some. Here again Ismail and Ganesha had a second quarrel about you; Ganesha said that you were too old to adopt, that you would remember all that had happened, and that he would strangle you; and the abuse that you poured upon him made him still more savage. Again they drew their swords, and would have fought about you, but we prevented them.

"You were taken away by me to a distance; I rubbed your swollen neck, and Ismail gave you a strong dose of opium, which put you to sleep, and we again resumed our flight.

"Ganesha and he were never cordial friends after that day; they never acted in concert again until, as I heard, in your last expedition; and

though they preserved an outward show of civility to each other, their hate was as strong as ever.

"Ismail took you to his home. He was married, but had no children; and as you grew up and improved under his kind and fatherly treatment, he become proud of you, and used often to say to us that he regretted your father had left your sister behind when he undertook his fatal journey to Indoor."

"My sister!" cried I, in an agony of apprehension.

'Yes, Meer Sahib, your sister. I, for one, heard your father say that he left her behind, as she was too young to be moved. You might get news of her at Eklera if you ever get out of this cursed hole."

But he now spoke to one bereft of sense—of any feeling save that of choking, withering, blighting agony. Why did not my heart-strings crack in that moment? Why did I live to drag a load of remorse with me to my grave?

Yet it was even so. I live and I have borne my misery as best I could. To most I appear calm and cheerful, but the wound rankles in my heart; and could you but know my sufferings, sahib, you would perhaps pity me. Not in the daytime is my mind disturbed by the thoughts of the past; it is at night, when all is still around me, and sleep falls not upon my weary eyelids, that I see again before me the form of my unfortunate sister; again I fancy my hands busy with her beautiful neck, and the vile piece of coin for which I killed her seems again in my grasp as I tore it from her warm bosom. Sahib, there is no respite from these hideous thoughts; if I eat opium—which I do in large quantities, to produce a temporary oblivion—I behold the same scene in the dreams which it causes, and it is distorted and exaggerated by the effects of the drug. Nay, this is worse to bear than the simple reality, to which I sometimes become accustomed, until one vision more vivid than its predecessors again plunges me into despair of its ever quitting me.

Sahib, after that fatal relation, I know not what I did for many days. I believe I raved, and they thought me mad, but my mind was strong and not to be overthrown. I recovered, though slowly, and again and again I retraced in my memory the whole of my life till that miserable day on which I murdered my sister! It could have been no other.

I tried in vain to cheat myself into the belief that it was another; but no effort that I made could shake the conviction that it was she. My unaccountable recollection of Eklera, the relation of my father's death by the old man there, his almost recognition of me, and, more than al', the old and worthless coin for which I destroyed her, and which I now remembered perfectly,—all were undeniable proofs of my crime; and conviction, though I tried to shut it out, entered into my soul, and abode there. Alla help me, I was a wretched being! My hair turned grey, my form and strength wasted, and any one who had seen me before I listened to the old Thug, would not have recognised me two months afterwards. A kind of burning fever possessed me; my blood felt hot as it coursed through my veins; and the night, oh, how I dreaded it! I never slept except by day, when exhausted nature claimed some respite. Night after night, for months and months, I either rolled to and fro on my miserable pallet, or sat up and rocked myself, groaning the while in remorse and anguish. No other act of my life rose up in judgment against me—none but that one; I tried even to think on others, but they passed from my mind as quickly as they entered it, and my sister was ever before me.

You know the worst, sahib—think of me as you will, I deserve it. I cannot justify the deed to myself, much less to you; and the only consolation I have—that it was the work of fate, of unerring destiny—is but a weak one, that gives way before the conviction of my own guilt. I must bear my curse, I must wither under it. I pray for death,

and as often too pray that I may live, and that my measure of punishment may be allotted to me here, that my soul may not burn in Jehanum. I may now as well bring my history to a close, to the time when, by accepting your boon of life, I became dead to the world.

My old companion died in the fourth year of our captivity. I would fain have had him deny the tale he told me of my father's destruction, but he would not; he was dying when I urged him to do so, and again declared in the most solemn manner that what he had related was true in every particular; and again he referred me to Ganesha, my mother's murderer, for confirmation of the whole.

In the twelfth year of my imprisonment the old king died, and his successor, the late monarch, ascended the musnud. Many a heart beat quickly and with renewed hope—hope that had almost died within the hearts of those wretches who were immured within the walls—and of mine among the rest. We had heard that it was customary to release all who had been sentenced to perpetual imprisonment; and you can hardly imagine, sahib, the intense anxiety with which I looked for the time when the mandate should be issued for our release, or when I should no longer dare to hope.

It came at last: after some days of weary expectation, the order reached the darogha, and it was quickly conveyed to me. I was brought forth, the chains were knocked off my legs, and I was free. Five rupees were given to me, and a suit of coarse clothes in place of those which hung in rags about my person. After more than twelve weary years I issued from those prison walls, and was again thrown upon the world to seek my fortune.

What to do, or whither to go, I knew not; but a faint hope that I might discover some of my old associates if I could reach Bundelkhund impelled me to travel thither.

It was as I thought: I was never without a meal, though it might be of the coarsest food; and when

I reached Jhalone, my little stock of money was nearly as large as when I had left Lukhnow. I went direct to the house of the moolla, for my thoughts were ever with my daughter, and my soul yearned to know her fate. Alas! I was disappointed. His house was inhabited by another, whom I knew not, and all he could tell me was that the old man had gone to Delhi, he believed, some years before, and that he had not heard any tidings of him since. I asked after his daughters, but the man knew nothing of them, except that one he had adopted had been married in Jhalone to a person who resided in a village of the country, but of his name or direction he was ignorant.

I turned away from the door,—I dared not pass my own, and I withdrew to an obscure part of the town where there was a small garden in which a fakeer usually resided. Him I had known of old, he had eaten of my bread and received my alms, and now I was his equal. He will not recognize me, thought I, in this dress, and changed as I am no one knows me; I will seek him, however, and if he is as he used to be, I may learn some news of my old friends.

Gradually I discovered myself to the old man: I led him to speak of old times and of persons by allusion to whom he must know I was a Thug. He did not hesitate to speak of them, and in particular of myself, whose fate he mourned with such true grief that I could control myself no longer; and to his wondering ear I related the whole of my adventures, from the time I had been released by the rajah, to the period of my taking up my abode with him. And much had I to hear from him in return, much that distressed and grieved me: many of my old companions were dead, others had been seized and executed, and hardly one of the old leaders of Bundelkhund were in the country or in the exercise of their vocation; new leaders had sprung up, and he spoke in warm terms of a young man named Feringheea, who, when I had last seen him, was a mere boy.

CHAPTER XV.

THE END OF THE THUG'S CAREER.

1—*Caught by the English.*

Four months passed thus. To support the old fakeer as well as myself, I was obliged to perambulate the town daily, and I asked and received alms, given in the meanest portions, in the place where my hand had ever been open to the poor. A sad change in my fortune, sahib! yet I bore up against it with resignation, if not with fortitude, hoping for better days and new adventures.

I burned to throw off my wretched disguise and again take to the road—it mattered not whether as a leader or a subordinate, so that I could once more be a Thug. Nor was I old; true, my beard had become grizzled and grey, and care had seamed my countenance with many wrinkles; but I was still strong and powerful, and my hands had not forgotten their cunning. Four months, I have said, had elapsed, and as no Thugs came near Jhalone, I set off, with a few rupees I had saved from the produce of my daily alms, for Tearee, where I hoped to meet the brahmin astrologer who had so materially aided me in the affair of the pearl-merchant. His share of that booty had been duly remitted to him immediately on my arrival at Jhalone, and though I had never heard from him afterwards, yet I felt assured that the letter could not have miscarried.

I reached Tearee after many days I knew that bands of Thugs were abroad, for I saw their fire-places and marks at many villages and upon the roads; but I met with none, to my disappointment,

and on my arrival I hastened at once to the temple, where I found the brahmin; and, notwithstanding my misfortunes, I was kindly, nay, warmly, welcomed. The brahmin still kept up his connection with Thugs, and I learned from him to my joy that a band, under a jemadar named Ramdeen, about twenty in number, had passed through the town only the day before, and were on their road towards the Nerbudda.

"You can easily overtake them, Meer Sahib," he said; "and if your old fame as a leader fails in procuring you a welcome reception, a few lines from me may aid you." And he wrote a note to the jemadar, informing him who I was, and how I had been connected with him of old. I did not long delay after I had received it, and again set off in search of my future companions I came up with them on the second day, and warm indeed was the welcome I received; one and all were amazed to see me, whom they had long thought dead. I was clothed in decent raiment by them, admitted as one of their band, and treated as a brother. Truly their kindness was refreshing to my almost withered heart. Ramdeen insisted that I should take an equal rank with him in the band; and after the necessary ceremonies I resumed my normal, and in a few days again ate the goor of the tupounee.

We avoided the Company's territories and kept to those of Sindia, penetrating as far as Boorhanpoor, and on our return visiting the shrine of Oonkar Manduttee, on the Nerbudda. From this latter place we were fortunate in enticing a party of pilgrims, and a large booty fell into our hands at the bottom of the Jam Ghat, whither we escorted them on their return to Oojein. Upwards of four hundred rupees was my share of this: so again you see me independent and fortune smiling upon me. But Ramdeen became jealous of me, and of my superior skill and intelligence. We had many quarrels, and at last I left him and determined, with what I had, to travel to the Dukhun, and to

seek my fortune in the Nizam's country, where I knew that Thuggee still flourished unchecked.

But it was fated not to be so. My road from where I left Ramdeen lay through Saugor, and there I met with my old acquaintance Ganesha, at the head of a small band, apparently in wretched plight. I could but ill dissemble my feelings of abhorrence at meeting with him; my own misfortunes and history and the tale of my companion in imprisonment were fresh in my recollection; nevertheless I disguised the dislike I felt, though revenge still rankled in my heart, and I would gladly have seized an opportunity to satisfy it. Among his band was a Thug I had known in former days; he was weary of Ganesha, whose temper was not improved by age, and he advised me to put myself at the head of a few men he could point out to me who would be faithful, and who, he thought, would prove the nucleus of a large band; for my name was still fresh in the memory of the older Thugs, who would gladly flock to me when they heard I was determined to set up for myself without connection with others. And he was right; in a few months I was at the head of forty men; and we were fortunate. Taking a new direction we passed through the territories of the Rewah Rajah, returning to our home, which we fixed in a village not far from Hindia, in a wild and unfrequented tract, where we were secure from treachery and from the operations against the Thugs then being carried on from Saugor.

Two years passed in this manner, and I was content, for I was, as I wished to be, powerful and actively employed. Two seasons we went out and returned laden with plunder, and the name of Amir Ali was again known and feared. Another season and it shall be my last, said I; I had discovered some clue to my daughter, and thought (vain idea !) if I could only collect a few thousand rupees, that I could dare to seek her, to live near her, and to abandon Thugee for ever. Why was

I thus infatuated? what else could it have been but that inexorable fate forbade it?

I had planned an expedition, on a larger scale than ever, towards Calcutta, and we had sworn to Bhowanee to pay our devotions at her shrines of Bindachul and Calcutta; the omens were favourable, and we left our home in joy and high excitement. And what cared I then, though I knew that the English had set a price of five hundred rupees upon me? It was a proof that I was dreaded and feared, and I rejoiced that Amir Ali, the oppressed and despised for a time, had again emerged from his obscurity, and I braved the danger which threatened me. I was a fool for this, yet it was my destiny that impelled me; and of what avail would have been precautions, even had I taken any? I knew that treachery could not reach me where I was, and I trusted to my apparently lasting new run of good fortune, and to the omens with which our expedition had begun, to escape apprehension in the districts of the Company's territories, where operations against Thugs were being carried on with much success.

Saugor, I have said, lay directly in our route, and we reached a village close to it on the evening of a day of severe travel. We were fatigued already, but the town was now so close to us that we did not hesitate to push on, and we arrived at the well-known spot shortly after dark. Selecting an empty shed in as lonely a part of the town as we could, we cooked a hasty meal and lay down, determined to rise before dawn and again pursue our journey. One of our number was set to watch ere we retired to rest, and we depended upon him to give us warning should any suspicious person be observed.

The night passed, and I arose, roused my followers, and long before day had dawned we were beyond the gates of the town. "See," said I to my friend, "our much-dreaded danger is past; we are now again on our way, and we shall leave this spot at least ten coss behind us before noon; be-

yond that there is nothing to fear, and we shall travel with light hearts." Alas! I spoke as my sanguine hope prompted me to do; but it was not fated to be as we thought. Again treachery had been at work, and when I conceived I possessed a band free from all suspicion, two traitors, as I afterwards heard, had already laid a deep plan for my apprehension. Of this however I will tell you hereafter; you are now with us on the road, and you see us urging our course with the utmost speed.

Already had we lost sight of the town, and before us was a broad, well-beaten road, which I well remembered; yet I feared so public a route, and determined to strike off into a bye-path as soon as I could see one which diverged in the direction we were going. We might have proceeded a coss or two perhaps, and the day was now beginning to dawn; a nulla was before us a short distance, and as none of us had washed before leaving the town, I proposed that we should perform our ablutions there, the better to enable us to sustain the fatigue of the stage before us. My proposal was agreed to, and when we reached the running stream, one and all ungirded their loins and sat down by the water; we had not been engaged thus for more than a few minutes when a sudden rush was made upon us by a number of horse and foot soldiers, who must have been lying in wait for us on the road we were to travel.

I had left my weapons at some little distance from the water, and my first impulse was to endeavour to possess myself of them; but in this I was foiled. Two of my own men threw themselves upon me and held me, and as I vainly struggled to free myself some foot-soldiers seized me. I was thrown down and bound. The surprise was not complete. A few of my band drew their swords, and some blows were exchanged between them and the party who had come upon us, and a few of my Thugs were wounded; but we were all overpowered, and the whole affair was concluded in less time

than it requires to relate it; only a few of my men escaped.

And thus, in bitter agony of spirit, and indulging vain regrets at my senseless imprudence in approaching Saugor, they led me, bound and guarded, by the road I had just travelled, free then as the morning breeze which played on me. For the third time I was a prisoner, and now I saw no hope: I had retained some on each of the former occasions, but it all vanished now. Then I was young, and a young heart is always buoyant and self-comforting; but the fire of my spirit had long been quenched, and it was only in the wild excitement of a life of continual adventure and unrestrained freedom, when I resembled what I had formerly been, that it rekindled within me. Death too was now before me; for I knew the inexorable laws of the Europeans, and that no mercy was shown to Thugs of any grade,—how much less to me for whom a reward had been offered! It was a bitter thought: I should be hung,—hung like a dog,—I who ought to have died on a battle-field! *there* death would have been sweet, and followed by an everlasting paradise. Alas! even this hope deserted me now, and I felt that the load of crime with which my soul was oppressed would weigh me down into hell.

2—The End.

A short time after our arrival at the town, I was conducted, closely guarded, to the officer who was employed by the English Government to apprehend Thugs. A tall, noble-looking person he was, and from the severe glance he cast on me I thought my hour was come, and that ere night I should cease to exist. I had prepared myself however for the worst; I saw no pity in his stern countenance, and I confess I trembled when he addressed me.

"So, you are Amir Ali, Jemadar," said he, "and at last you are in my power; know you aught of the accusations against you, and wherefore you are here? Read them," he continued to an attend-

ant moonshee, " read the list which has been drawn up; yonder villain looks as though he would deny them."

The man unfolded a roll of paper written in Persian, and read a catalogue of crime, of murders, every one of which I knew to be true; a faithful record it was of my past life, with but few omissions.

"The proof, Sahib Bahadur;" said I, "you English are praised for your justice, and, long as that list is of crimes I never before heard of, you will not deny me fair-hearing and the justice you give to thousands."

"Surely not; whatever your crimes may be, do not fear that your case shall be inquired into. Call the approvers," said he to an attendant; "bring them in one by one, and the jemadar shall hear what they have told me about him."

The first man who entered was an old associate of mine in former days, before my misfortunes commenced: he had been with me in the expedition just before my father had been put to death by the rajah of Jhalone, which I have minutely described to you; and he related the whole, from the murder of the moonshee and his child down to the last event, the destruction of the pearl-merchant. His story took a long time in relating, and the whole was so fresh in my recollection, and he was so exact and true in its details, that I could not answer a word, nor put a single question to shake his testimony. In conclusion he referred the officer to the rajah of Jhalone for corroboration of the whole, and he appealed to me to declare whether aught he had said was false. "Not only," said he, "do you know, Meer Sahib, that it is all true, but there are others as well as myself who can speak to these facts; and know, moreover, that many graves have been opened, and the remains of your victims have been disinterred."

"Say *yours* as well as mine," I replied, thrown completely off my guard at last, and nettled by the emphasis he had placed on the words "your victims." "You had as much to do with them as

myself; besides, did you not aid that villain Ganesha when I would have saved the child of the moonshee?"

"He has confessed!" cried many voices.

"Silence!" said the officer, "let no one dare to speak. Do you know, Amir Ali, what you have said? Are you aware that you have admitted you are a Thug?"

"It is useless now to attempt to recall my words," said I doggedly; "make the most of them, for after this you shall wring no more from me; no, not by the most horrible tortures you can inflict."

The examination, however, proceeded. Others were brought forward who had known me or been connected with me in Thuggee, and at last those who had earned the reward of the Government by betraying me. They had been associated with me for the last two years, and they related what I had done, and where the bodies of the murdered were lying. After this was finished, and all the depositions recorded, I was remanded to prison; and the better to secure me, I was not only loaded with irons, but confined in a cell by myself.

After many days, which elapsed without my being sent for, and when I had concluded that my fate was decided, the moonshee whom I had seen in the court, with a jemadar of Nujeeb's and two of the approvers, came to me.

"Amir Ali," said the first, "we are sent by the Sahib Bahadur to tell you of your fate."

"I can guess it," said I—"I am to suffer with the rest. Well! many a good Thug has thus died before me, and you shall see that Amir Ali fears not death."

"You have guessed rightly," said the moonshee, "there is no hope for you: your final trial will come on in a day or two, and there is such an array of facts against you, and the accounts from the rajah of Jhalone so entirely agree with the statements of all the approvers, that it is impossible

you can escape death; or if you do escape it, nothing can save you from the Kala Panee."

"Death!" cried I, "death at once! Ah, Moonshee! you have influence with my judges, you can prevent my being sent away over the far sea, never to behold my country more, and to linger out the remnant of my days in a strange land, condemned to work in irons. These hands have never been used to labour; how shall I endure it? Death is indeed welcome, compared with the Kala Panee."

"But why should it be either, Meer Sahib?" asked the jemadar; "your life or death is in your own hands: these men will tell you how they are treated by the master they serve, and you may be like them if you are wise."

"Never!" cried I; "never shall it be said of Amir Ali that he betrayed an associate."

"Listen, Kumbukht!" said the Moonshee; "we are not come to use entreaties to one who deserves to die a thousand deaths, to one whose name is a terror to the country; you are in our power, and there is no averting your fate: an alternative is offered, which you may accept or not as you please; no force is used, no arguments shall be wasted on you. Say at once, will you live and become an approver like the rest,—have good clothes to wear and food to eat, and be treated with consideration, or will you die the death of a dog? Speak, my time is precious, and I have no orders to bandy words with you."

"Accept the terms, Amir Ali," said both the approvers; "do not be a fool, and throw your last chance of life away!"

"They left me, and I mused over my lot. I was to die; that was determined. Did I fear death? not at first: I looked at the transition as one that would lead me to eternal joys, to paradise, to my father and Azeema. But as I thought again and again, other reflections crowded on my spirit: I was to die, but how? not like a man or a soldier, but like a miserable thief, the scorn of thousands who would exult in my dying struggles; and then

I remembered those of the wretch who had been hung before my eyes when Bhudrinath was with me, and I pictured to myself the agony he must have suffered ere life was extinct—the shame of the death—the ignominy which would never leave my memory. All these weighed heavily on me. On the other hand was life—one of servitude it was true, but still it was life; I should be protected, and I might once more perhaps be free, if the Europeans relented towards me, and I did them faithful service.

My determination was made, and I requested that the moonshee who had formerly spoken with me on the subject might be sent for. He came, and I told him at once that I was willing to accept the alternative he had offered.

"Ah! you speak like a wise man now," said he, "and if you exert yourself in the service you have embraced, and prove yourself faithful and trustworthy, you may rely upon it indulgences, as far as can be granted to a person in your condition, will be allowed to you hereafter; but you must first deserve them, for with the Europeans nothing goes by favour."

"I am ready," I replied, "point out what I am to do, and you will find that Amir Ali can be true to the salt he eats."

"Then come, it is still early, and I will take you at once to the court, there you will receive your instructions."

My prison irons were struck off, and a light steel rod with a ring attached to it fastened about my right leg, so that it left me at perfect liberty to walk but not to run, and I was duly admitted as an approver, under the threat of instant execution in case I ever neglected my duty, failed to give information where I really possessed it, or abused in any way the confidence which had been reposed in me.

"Know you aught of Ganesha?" said the officer to me.

"I do, Sahib Bahadur," I replied, "I know him

well: you have offered a reward for him as you did for me, and yet you know not that even at this moment he is within a few coss of Saugor."

"Can you guide my people to him?" he asked. "Remember, this is the first matter with which you are entrusted, and I need not say that I require you to use your utmost intelligence in it. Ganesha is wary, and has hitherto evaded every attempt which has been made to apprehend him."

"I will undertake it," I exclaimed. "It is possible he does not know of my capture; and if you will give me six of your own men, I will disguise them, and pledge myself to bring him to you; and not only him, but Himmut, who is, I know, with him."

I left him. I found the men, six resolute-looking fellows, well armed; I stripped them of their badges of office, and made them throw dust on their garments so that it should appear they had travelled far. The iron on my leg I secured so that it should make no noise, and not be visible under my trousers: and I put the party in motion.

It was nearly evening, and avoiding the town I struck at once into the open country. "If we travel well," said I to the men, "we may be up with him by midnight."

We reached the village in the very dead of night; everything was still, and it was perfectly dark, which aided my purpose, for my companion's face could not be distinguished, and my own approach to the patel's house would not be noticed. "Now," said I to the Nujeeb, "you alone must accompany me; let the rest of your men stay here; I will bring Ganesha here, and then you must bind him."

"Remember," I continued, "that you are neither to speak to Ganesha nor the other, if he is here. I will get them out of the house; after that look well to your weapons. If they attempt to escape, or show suspicion of our real errand, fall on Himmut when I ask you how far it is to Saugor; leave me to deal with Ganesha;—we are two to

two, and Ganesha is a better swordsman than the other. You will remember this."

"I will," he replied; "I will stick by you—I fear not now, for I see you are faithful."

A few more steps brought me to the patel's house, and I called for him by name. "Jeswunt! Jeswunt! rouse yourself and come out, man. Thou knowest who I am." I spoke in Ramasee, which I knew he understood. He answered me from within, and soon after I heard the bars and bolts of his door removed, and he came forth wrapped in a sheet. "Who calls me," he asked.

"I, your friend Amir Ali," I replied; "where is Ganesha?"

"Asleep, within; why do you ask?"

"And Himmut?"

"Asleep also; what do ye want with either? and what brings you here, Meer Sahib, so late or so early, which you please? we thought you were half way to Calcutta."

"Ah," said I, "that matter has been given up; the Nujeebs were out, and there was risk. But go and rouse Ganesha, I have some work in hand for him, and have no time to lose; it must be finished by daylight."

I heard the patel awaken Ganesha; I heard the growling tones of his voice as he first abused him for rousing him, and afterwards his eager question, "Amir Ali here! ai Bhowanee, what can he require of me?" At length his gaunt figure appeared at the doorway. How my heart bounded within me, and then sickened, so intense was my excitement on beholding him.

"Where art thou, Amir Ali?" said he; "I can see nought in this accursed darkness."

"Here," said I, "you will see well enough by-and-by when your eye is accustomed to it. Give me your hand; now descend the step; that is right." We embraced each other.

"Are you ready for work?" I asked, "I have only two men with me, and we have picked up some bunij; there will be good spoil too if you will

join us,—alone we can do nothing, there are four of them."

"Where?" he asked.

"Yonder, in the lane; I have pretended to come for fire."

"Who is that with you?"

"A friend; no fear of him, he is one of us."

"Does he speak Ramasee?"

"Not yet," said I, "he is a new hand, but a promising one; but where is Himmut?"

"Within, snoring there, you may even hear him; wait for me a moment, I will go for my sword and shoes, and rouse him up."

He went in, and returned in a short time fully equipped; Himmut accompanied him, and we exchanged salutations.

"Now, come along," said I, "there is no time to lose."

"Hark ye!" said Ganesha, "there is a well in yonder lane, will that do for the bhil?"

"Certainly," I replied, "you will see the men directly." Soon after I had spoken we approached our party.

"Who goes there?" cried one of them.

"A friend—Amir Ali!"

"Then all is right," was the reply, and in another instant we had joined them.

"There are your men, seize them!" cried I, throwing myself upon Ganesha with such violence that we fell to the ground together, struggling with deadly hate; but two of the Nujeebs came to my aid, just as Ganesha had succeeded in drawing a small dagger he wore in his girdle, and as I had fortunately seized his hand.

"Bind him hand and foot," said I, disengaging myself from him, "and gag him, or he may alarm the village by his cries." This was done, and he was disarmed; a cloth was tied round his mouth so that he could not speak, and we hurried our prisoners along as fast as the darkness and the roughness of the road would allow.

We reached Saugor; and the delight with which

the officer received Ganesha from my hands could not be concealed. "A deep blow has been struck at Thugee in the capture of this villain," said he, "and thou hast done thy duty well, Amir Ali."

From that hour I rose in his confidence and estimation, and I have never forfeited it.

Ganesha's trial came on, and I was the principal witness against him. I told all I knew of the murders he had committed, and others corroborated my statements in the fullest manner. He was sentenced to die.

In vain was it that I entreated to see him before his execution; I wanted to taunt him with his fate, and to embitter his last hours, if anything I could have said might have done so. It was denied me; the officer knew of my purpose, and was too humane to allow it. But I saw him die—him and twenty others—all at the same moment. And now, my life became one of dull routine and inactivity. One by one I tracked and apprehended my old associates, till none of them remained at large.

I have remorse, but for one act, and that will never leave me. Yet I must support it, until Alla pleases to send the Angel to loose the cord which binds my life to the day it inhabits.

NOTES.

Teachers are advised to study the map of central India and the Deccan for the names of places. A clear geographical idea of the story adds to its interest. See the *Atlas Appendix* vol. XXVI of the Imperial Gazetteer.

The spelling of words of Indian origin is that given in Meadows Taylor's original text. This spelling is not uniform but variations have been noted. Most of the words thus affected are well known to Indian readers and will be readily recognized.

Chapter I.

Holkar : the Holkar family is of Mahratta origin. Mulhar Rao Holkar was born in 1693 in the Deccan. In 1724 he received from the Peshwa that portion of Malwa that has Indore as its capital. His rise to power coincides with the breaking up of the Mogul dynasty, and the founding of the five Mahratta kingdoms in the time of the second Peshwa (1723-1740).

The period of the *Confessions* is roughly the close of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. The third Mahratta war with Holkar took place in 1804. The Pindari war in which Amir Ali, the Thug, fought on the side of Cheetoo, was ended in 1817.

Dooly : a light palankeen.

Juwan : a young man, applied often to soldiers : in this case to the guards of the family when on their journey.

Indoor : the modern Indore, now a feudatory state in the Central India Agency. The Vindhya Mountains traverse it from West to East Its population is about one million, the capital is Indore, with the palace of Holkar.

Julabee : sweetmeats.

Hulwaee : confectioner.

Thug : probably from the Sanskrit *sthaga*, a cheat or swindler. The word soon came to possess the specific meaning now attaching to it. These criminals were described also as *phansigar*, from *phansi*, a noose. The authority on the subject of the Thugs is Sir William Henry Sleeman, whose book *Ramaseeana*, a vocabulary of Thug slang, contains a description of their habits.

Under what circumstances : the reference is to the most tragic incident in the *Confessions* when Amir Ali, the Thug, unknowingly murdered his own sister in order to secure the charm here described. The facts are fully outlined at the close of the Thug's narrative in chapter XIV, section 4.

Patail : the head officer of a village.

Sipahee : in modern English, *Sepoy*. The word is Persian, meaning an army. It is often derived from *asp*, a horse. With the Turks *spahi* means a horseman

Coss : a popular measure of distance like the mile in English. The Sanskrit word is *krosa* (Bengali *kros*), the distance at which a man's voice could be heard. It is roughly two miles.

Scindia : Sindhia, the Mahratta prince Madhava Rao Sindhia who captured Gwalior in 1784. His successor, Daulat Rao Sindhia was beaten by Holkar in 1802, and at Assaye in 1803 by Arthur Wellesley.

Ameer : spelt alternately *Ameer* and *Amir*, Amir Ali the Thug leader in this romance.

Goor : raw sugar or molasses, used in the initiatory rites of the Thugs.

Qusrut : gymnastic exercises.

Feringhee : Frank or European. Originally the word was applied by the Moslems to their Christian enemies in the Crusades.

Dusera : Dasahara, the ten day's festival in October. In Western and Southern India this was a partly military festival when expeditions were inaugurated. To the Mahratta it had special meaning ; likewise to the Thug as is shown in the text.

Wars of Holkar and Scindia with the Feringhees : see the above notes and read the history of events before and after the battle of Assaye in 1803.

Sheopoor : in the Gwalior state, Central India.

Chapter II.

Salaam Aleikoom : salutation and peace.

Inshalla : please God.

Purrat Bagh : a man tiger, one inhabited by a human spirit and so proof against injury.

Tegha : a short, crooked sword.

Bhowanee : the wife of Siva, or Kali the goddess of destruction, the patron goddess of the Thugs according to their traditional beliefs. See pages 28 to 30 of the text.

Namaz : daily prayer.

Dhobees : washermen.

Bhats : poets and genealogists. These people often accompanied travellers as guarantees against robbery.

Sikhs : the disciples of Nanak Shah who rose to power in the 16th century.

Nanakshahees : followers of the Sikh leader, and religious mendicants.

Mudaree Fakirs : a sect of Mahomedan mendicants.

Bhungees ; sweepers.

Tailees : oilmen.

Lohars : blacksmiths

Burraes : carpenters.

Dukhun : from *Dakshina*, the south, the tableland of the southern peninsula of India, usually spelt *Deccan*.

Nagpoor : the towns named in this paragraph give a clear idea of the territory operated over by the Thug bands whose capture was the work of Sir Henry Sleeman. See map of India for Nagpur (Central Provinces), Haiderabad and Aurangabad, towns forming a triangle in the Deccan plateau.

Lota : a small vessel for water.

Pilhaoo : the appearance or voice of the animals from which omens are taken *on the left*. The reverse of the *thibaoo*. It signifies that the deity has taken the gang by the left arm to lead them on. The *Thibaoo* signifies that she has taken them by the right arm also. Otherwise the gang returns home and waits for favourable omens.

Thibaoo : see above.

Nishan : the pickaxe or *kodalee* before consecration.

Khussee : the pick-axe after consecration ; another word is *Mahee*. The above four words are pure Ramasee, or Thug slang.

Dall : boiled pulse.

Sothaee : the inveiglers or decoys.

Mootsuddee : a clerk.

Khayet : one of a clerical caste.

Bhuttote : amongst the Thugs, the actual strangler.

Chapter III.

Sahoukars : bankers or merchants. It often appears as *Sowcar*.

Peshwah : the *Peshwa*, or prime minister of the Satara kingdom, rose to power amongst the Mahrattas and founded a kingdom whose dynasty took this name. The second Peshwa, Baji Rao, (1720-1740) was one of the Mahratta leaders whose

capitals were Satara, Baroda, Gwalior, Indore and Nagpur. The Peshwa here referred to, was defeated in 1818 at Koregaon. He surrendered to Sir John Malcolm, and died in 1853 near Cawnpore.

Shookr Alla : thanks to God.

Lughaees : the Thugs whose duty is to bury victims. *Lugha* is the Ramasee word for *grave digger*.

Khodawund : a title of great respect, my Lord.

Chapter IV.

Tupounee : the ceremony of sacrificing goor after a murder, part of the Thug ritual. Great sanctity attached to the consecrated goor which, if eaten by young disciples, insured their speedy advance.

Rendezvous : two French words, literally "render yourself" or "be present". Hence the secondary meaning, a meeting place by appointment.

Jemadar : an officer, one in command.

Hookas : the Indian pipe for smoking through water.

Uomerkher : south-west of Nagpur, in the Yeotmal district of Berar.

Sotha : the inveigler of the Thug gang.

Chowree : the public hall of a town.

Kotwal : the magistrate of a town.

Nuzzur : an offering of respect.

Sethjee : *Seth* means merchant, and *Jee* is the usual termination of respect.

Hakim : ruler or governor.

Saringee : the Indian violin.

Meywaree Rajputs : a tribe of Rajputs, the Sesodias, who ruled in Mewar or Udaipur.

Kabool hooa : it is accepted.

Syed : a sect of Mahomedans claiming direct descent from the Prophet. *Saiyid* means *lord*.

Ungrez Feringhees : English foreigners as opposed to the *Francese*, or French.

Kafir : a term of contempt, an unbeliever.

Tellingana : Telinga or Madras, an area from which non-Moslem recruits for the Company's armies were obtained. Hence the reference to "Kafirs of Tallingana". The word *Telinga* was often used with the meaning of *Sepoy*.

Hyder Ali: this section (page 62) serves admirably to date the story. The English operations against Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan of Mysore were finished in 1799. Hyder Ali (1722-1782) was a soldier of fortune who deposed the Hindu raja of Mysore. He was defeated by Sir Eyre Coote in 1781.

Soger: a corruption of 'soldier'. The reference here is to the great vigour of the military operations against Tippu, and their success.

Chapter V.

Dullal: a broker, an intermediary in business transactions.

Roomals and Doputtas: handkerchiefs and pieces of cloth. The *dooputty* is a single piece of cloth, the principal article of apparel. The word is used by servants to mean a sheet for a bed. The *roomal* was, of course, the Thug weapon of murder.

Chapter VI.

Punjah: a hand, the symbol of the Creator.

Aftabgeer: a large sun screen.

Mahout: the driver and keeper of an elephant. The word has great dignity, meaning "one high in service".

Ankoos: a goad of heavy metal to control the elephant.

Nagaras: large drums.

Moonakib: hymns sung in the Mohurrum.

Murceas: hymns.

Tazeas: representations of the tombs of Hussein and Hassan, carried in procession during Mohurrum.

Gomashta: an agent or factor. The word is now used for a vernacular clerk.

Jehanunm: hell.

Ganja: the flowering shoots of the Indian hemp used as an intoxicant.

Pullawalla: a grain porter.

Bhung-khana: drink-shop. Bhung is distilled from the leaves of hemp.

Chapter VII.

Tumbolee: a seller of betel and tobacco.

Beeder: north west of Hyderabad, in the Nizam's dominions.

Nobut: a musical instrument or drum, sounded over the entrance of a nobleman's house at stated hours.

Gonds: an aboriginal tribe whose home is the forests of the Mardian Hills in the basin of the Indravati river. They use stone implements, and are lower than the Bhils in the scale of civilization.

Golconda: close to Hyderabad and Secunderabad.

Mausoleums: magnificent tombs, the name is derived from *Mausolus*, the king of Caria, whose widow in 350 B. C. erected a splendid tomb in his memory.

Durgah: a shrine.

Chapter IX.

Lieutenant of Hussars: an officer in a British cavalry regiment. The word *Hussar* is of Hungarian origin. It means *twenty*, as one cavalry soldier was levied from every twenty families.

Oordoo: literally the language of the camp. The word *urdu*, a royal camp, coming into India with Babar, the mixed language that grew up in the court and the camp came to be known as *Urdu*. It is the origin of the English word, *horde*.

Patois: a provincial dialect of a mean or vulgar sort; it is derived from *patria*, native land.

Chapter X.

Dusera of the year 18 —: see notes on chapter I. The actual year is not given; but as already shown the action of the *Confessions* lies in the first twenty or thirty years of the 19th century. Amir Ali ends his career in the period of Colonel Sleeman's investigations before 1835.

Jowaree: a large type of millet.

Chapter XI.

Cheetoo: a Pindaree soldier of fortune and a freebooter. The Pindarees were mere marauders who were encouraged by the Mahrattas for their own ends. They were subdued by Lord Hastings in 1817 who cut them off from Mahratta assistance. Amir Khan, one of their leaders, made terms with Lord Hastings, but Cheetoo escaped from the British armies, and was killed by a tiger in the jungles near Asirgarh. The description given of his character in the *Confessions* is probably an accurate one.

Dost Mahomed the founder of the Bhopal State about 1709.

Kureem Khan: the Pindaree leader who secured the Bhopal State and certain adjacent territory from Amir Khan. This area was lost to him after 1817. He was a noted leader of the Pindaree marauders.

Major Fraser : James Stuart Fraser (1783-1869), resident in Mysore and Hyderabad.

Harawul : the advance guard of an army on the march.

Chouke : the word is *chowk* or *chauk*, an open market place of a city. The word may mean the crossing of four ways, hence a central space.

Duffa and Duffadar : a person in charge of a small body of troops or a *duffa*.

Lubhur : a division of Pindarees.

Bhugwan : a Hindu term for the Deity.

Sikundur Jah : a ruler of the dynasty of Adil Shahi, the kings of Bijapur. He died in 1700 in the camp of Aurengzeb Here he is referred to as a symbol of royal power. See Meadows Taylor's *Tara*.

Zeafut : an entertaiment.

Ashruffee : a gold coin.

Chapter XII.

Moonshee : teacher or secretary.

Nizam ; the ruler of Hyderabad ; the official title of Asaf Jah, the founder of this dynasty who was a soldier under Aurengzeb. He became subadar of the Deccan in 1713. In 1748, the year of his death, he was independent ruler of a large part of the Deccan.

Chapter XIII.

Dewan Khana : reception room.

An English gentleman came to Jhalone : the reference is to the activity of Colonel Sleeman and his officers.

Hurkaras : messengers.

Mutsuddees ; clerks, writers.

Kulma : or *Kalima*, the Moslem creed.

Chapter XIV.

Bhutteara : keeper of an eating house.

Punah-i-Khoda : protection of God.

Shookr Khoda : thanks to God.

Bunij or Bunj : the Thug term for victims and booty. The word means merchandise or goods.

Murnae stock : the reference is to the town in the possession of Sindia where Amir Ali's foster-father settled. It was an old Thug area in Central India.

Jhirnee : the Thug signal for murder.

Goor of the Tupounee : to eat the goor, or to perform the Thug ceremonies following upon murder.

Kala Panee : the black water or great ocean.

Kumbukht : unfortunate or miserable person.

Ramasee : the peculiar slang of the Thugs. This was studied by Colonel Sleeman, and a vocabulary drawn up in his *Ramaseeana*, published in 1836 in Calcutta. The words belonging to Ramasee used in the text are all in the preceding notes.

Printed by P. C. Dass, at the Kuntaline Press, Calcutta.